



Nightclub Fire Safety Inspections

Washington joins Rhode Island as one of the first states to enact requirements for retroactive installation of fire sprinklers in nightclubs.

Night Club Sprinkler Rule

The 2007 Washington State Legislature unanimously approved Second Substitute House Bill 1811 making changes to a law enacted in 2005. That law required fire sprinklers to be installed in existing nightclubs. The 2007 bill significantly revised the definition of nightclubs requiring retroactive installation of fire sprinklers and extended the deadline for compliance with the law to December 1, 2009.

Definition of Nightclub

Under the new law, the requirement to install fire sprinklers will apply to existing nightclubs, restaurants and bars in which the aggregate area of concentrated use space that is specifically designated and primarily used for dancing or viewing performers exceeds 350 square feet, excluding adjacent lobby areas. Businesses excluded from this requirement are banquet halls, theaters with fixed seating, and lodge halls.

Examples of concentrated use space are dance floors and open standing space with or without unfixed chairs. (An area with tables and chairs is not considered concentrated use, and would not be considered for the application of this requirement.)

Prior requirements that pertained to the primary source of revenue for the nightclub, the type of performers and/entertainment, and the total occupant load were repealed and are no longer applicable.

Fire Sprinklers in New Nightclubs, Restaurants and Bars

Beginning July 1, 2006, Washington State Building and Fire Codes required that all newly constructed nightclubs, restaurants or bars install fire sprinklers where at least one of the following applies:

- 1) The fire area exceeds 5,000 square feet,
- 2) the occupant load equals 100 or more, or
- 3) the fire area is located on a floor other than the level of exit discharge.

“Fire area” is a term which means the area enclosed by fire walls, fire barriers, exterior walls, or fire-resistive-rated horizontal assemblies of a building.

Requirement for Sprinkler Systems

The Tacoma Fire Department will conduct inspections beginning in 2008 to determine if existing businesses meet the revised definition of a nightclub and will be subject to the requirement for installation of a fire sprinkler system.

Businesses currently operating in a manner that meets the definition of nightclub would not be subject to the sprinkler requirement if they alter their business operation in a manner so that they no longer meet the criteria listed in the nightclub definition.

Emergency Plan Requirements

Each fire safety and evacuation plan should be specifically developed in consideration of the special characteristics of the building, the people who work there and the patrons who frequent the business.

Plan Development

The plan should include the following information:

1. Emergency egress or escape routes.
2. The preferred and any alternative means of

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- notifying occupants of a fire or emergency.
3. Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for carrying out duties in response to a fire emergency.
 4. Procedures for personnel carrying out duties in response to a fire emergency.
 5. The procedure for reporting a fire or other emergency to the fire department.
 6. Procedures for accounting for employees and occupants after evacuation has been completed.
 7. Floor plans indicating the following:
 - Detailed seating plan, occupant load, and occupant load limit.
 - Occupancy assembly point.
 - Exits.
 - Primary and secondary evacuation routes.
 - Areas of refuge.
 - Location of manual fire alarm boxes.
 - Location of portable fire extinguishers.
 - Location of occupant-use hose cabinets.
 - Location of fire alarm controls.

Plan Maintenance

The fire safety and evacuation plan should be reviewed and updated by management at least annually, or more frequently if changes occur. The plans should be kept available in the workplace for reference and review by employees and copies should be furnished to the Tacoma Fire Department upon request.

Staff Training

Well-trained employees are critical to a successful emergency evacuation. Employees must receive evacuation training as part of new employee orientation and annual training thereafter. Employees should be familiar with fire alarm signals, the procedures detailed in the fire safety and evacuation plan, and the importance of workplace fire prevention.

Employees must understand that it is their responsibility to initiate and guide an

emergency evacuation of the facility when a fire emergency occurs. Upon hearing the fire alarm, employees should turn off all music and turn on the lights. This will make it easier for guests to hear the fire alarm and the evacuation instructions being given by staff. These directions should guide guests to the exits via the stairs, not elevators. Once outside it is important to move guests away from the building.

Training Tools

The Tacoma Fire Department Office of Emergency Management provides assistance in developing emergency plans. Visit the website at www.tacomafiredepartment.org to download information bulletins, fire fact sheets, and other training materials or contact the office directly at 253.591.5705.

Fire Drills

Quarterly fire drills (every 120 days) are required for employees of public assemblies with occupancies over 100.

Records shall be maintained of required fire drills and include the following information:

1. Identity of the person conducting the drill.
2. Date and time of the drill.
3. Notification method used.
4. Staff members on duty and participating.
5. Number of occupants evacuated.
6. Special conditions simulated.
7. Problems encountered.
8. Time required to accomplish evacuation.

False Alarms

In the event the fire alarm sounds and staff are able to verify that is a false alarm or malicious prank, call 911 immediately to report these findings to the Fire Department dispatcher. Do not silence the alarm without dispatcher permission. Do not reset the fire alarm panel until after receiving permission from the arriving Fire Department personnel.