

COMMON CODE VIOLATIONS FOUND IN COMMERCIAL AND MULTI-FAMILY BUILDINGS

Updated: March 2009

Our inspectors find that the following fire codes are frequently violated in commercial and multi-family buildings. To increase your safety and avoid paying extra fees, you may want to inspect your own building for these common problems *before* our inspector arrives. The inspector will also look for compliance with fire codes specific to your type of business or operation.

1. Provide approved address identification for building including suite or unit numbers (letters), plainly visible and contrasting to background color.

It is important that your address be visible from the street fronting your property. Suite or Unit numbers/letters should also be plainly visible. For larger complexes or buildings set back from the street, additional signs may be necessary if emergency responders are dispatched to an address. If the address does not readily identify the property location, precious time may be lost time that can save lives.

2. Remove obstruction and/or combustible material from exit-ways, stairways and fire escapes.

The safest way out of your place of business in an emergency is through the exits. Make sure that storage and merchandise are kept clear of exits and exit paths.

3. Secondary exits must be clearly marked; ensure that illuminated exit signs are fully lit at all times.

Generally all exits except the main entrance are required to have an 'EXIT' sign. If there are lighted exit signs, all bulbs must be illuminated when the building is occupied. Replace bulbs and check the operation of emergency lighting to ensure that they will work in the event of an emergency.

4. Repair fire doors to their automatic self-closing and latching condition. Remove all wedges and door stops.

Doors that have self-closing devices are designed to keep fire and smoke from spreading to other areas of the building. Wedges and door stops that hold these doors open reduce your chances of escape in the event of a fire. This practice allows for more rapid spread of fire and smoke throughout the building and increases the amount of fire damage.

5. Provide cover plates to all open electrical boxes and switches.

To confine potential arcing to within the safety of the outlet and junction boxes, replace all missing and damaged cover plates

6. Maintain 30” clearance in front of, and clear access to, all electrical panels.

Clearance around and access to your electrical panels allows firefighters to access circuit breakers quickly in case of emergency. If your panels are in an enclosed room, provide permanent signage (i.e. “Electrical Room”) to indicate location.

7. Discontinue use of extension cords and multi-plug adapters. (UL listed multiple-outlet strips with circuit breakers are acceptable).

Extension cords are designed only for use with portable appliances (eg. drill, buffer, grinder) not in place of permanent wiring. Multi-plug adapters are never allowed. The use of extension cords and non-approved, multi-plug adapters may overload the electrical circuit capacity and has been shown to be a major cause of fire. UL listed multiple-outlet strips with built in circuit breaker protection are allowed in lieu of extension cords. These outlet strips must plug directly into the wall outlet and the appliance must plug into the outlet strip.

8. Inspect fire extinguisher(s) monthly and maintain written log, or provide annual service.

Annual maintenance by a certified company is required for portable fire extinguishers unless monthly maintenance has been performed by trained individuals and written records maintained. Monthly maintenance checks and written records will, in most cases, allow the service by a certified extinguisher company to be extended to a six- (6) year interval.

9. If your business has a sprinkler system or fire alarm system, have it inspected and maintained on an annual basis.

Annual maintenance by a certified company is required for sprinkler systems, just like it is for portable fire extinguishers. This maintenance will ensure the system is working properly, has adequate pressure, and will be ready to protect your business in the event of a fire.

10. Maintain a clearance of 24” between the top of stacked storage and the ceiling in a building without a sprinkler system, and an 18” clearance if the building is equipped with a sprinkler system.

The 24” clearance will break the “fuel ladder” between the floor and the ceiling in the event of a fire, and will allow firefighters to direct water from fire hoses to the source of flames. Providing an 18” clearance allows ceiling mounted sprinklers to do their job and create an “umbrella” of water to extinguish a fire.