



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

2201 Warwick Way, Marriottsville, MD 21104

410-313-6000

Office of the Fire Marshal Pre-Inspection Checklist for Assembly, Business, and Mercantile Occupancies

A fire safety inspection will be conducted by the Office of the Fire Marshal at your occupancy. This fire safety inspection will assist you with providing a safe atmosphere for you, your patrons and your employees as well as the protection of your business. Our goal is to maintain a fire safe environment which is one step in leading to a fire safe Howard County.

In order to streamline the process, there are several items that can be corrected prior to the inspection. We have prepared this list for your review prior to the inspection and for future self-inspections. Be advised this checklist does not cover the fire code in its' entirety. The Fire Inspector may find fire code violations not listed below.

Section 1

Applies to Assembly, Business, and Mercantile Occupancies

Exits - All exits shall be kept clear always. Doors shall operate to the fully open position, securely latch when closed and be maintained in proper working order. Panic hardware and door closures shall be maintained in working order. Doors equipped with panic hardware shall not have any additional locks or latches. Exits shall not be locked from the egress side. All magnetic or special locking arrangements need to be approved by the AHJ.

Exit Signs - All exit signs shall always be illuminated and visible.

Emergency Lighting - Emergency lighting shall be tested every 30 days and maintained to automatically provide illumination in case of failure of the normal lighting.

Fire Extinguishers - All fire extinguishers shall be serviced annually by a licensed extinguisher company. Fire extinguishers shall be unobstructed, full, tagged, dated, and the key shall be in place and protected with a plastic seal. The extinguishers shall be mounted, with the top of the extinguisher between 3 and 5 feet in height and the bottom not closer than 4 inches to the floor.

Fire Alarm Systems - Fire alarm pull stations and alarm signaling devices shall be accessible, unobstructed, and visible. Fire alarm systems are always required to be fully operational. A Fire Watch is required for any system Out of Service or impaired for more than 4 hours.

Sprinkler Systems - Sprinkler heads shall not be obstructed or have articles hanging from them. Sprinkler control valve rooms shall be marked. A 3 feet clearance shall be kept around the valves. Sprinkler systems are always required to be fully operational. A Fire Watch is required for any system Out of Service or impaired for more than 4 hours.

Commercial Hood Systems – The hood's automatic fire-extinguishing system shall comply with UL300 or equivalent. The filters must be clean. When there are visible deposits of grease in the hood, the entire system shall be cleaned.



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Inspection, Testing, and Maintenance of Fire Protection Devices – Sprinkler and fire alarm systems shall have annual inspection, testing, and maintenance (ITM) by a licensed technician. In addition to the annual, there are also parts of these systems requiring monthly, quarterly, semiannual, and 5/10-year ITM. Commercial hood systems shall be inspected every 6 months by a licensed technician. The ITM report for each system shall be immediately reviewed by the occupant and all deficiencies shall be corrected immediately. A copy of each report shall be kept on the premises. All ITM reports shall be submitted to the Mobile-Eyes Inspection Software's Contractor Portal by the company performing the inspection, testing, and maintenance. All subsequent repairs shall be submitted to the Contractor Portal.

Fire Department Connections (FDC) – Sprinkler/standpipe fire department connections consist of all hose connections and control valves. All FDCs shall have signage as designated by the Office of the Fire Marshal. The FDC and its respective signage shall be visible to responding fire department units. The access to and around the FDC shall be kept clear, 7.5 feet around.

Storage - All storage shall be 18 inches below the ceiling as well as any sprinkler heads. It is suggested that painted lines or tape be placed on the walls to indicate "no storage above this point". NO storage shall be placed or kept in any portion of an exit or an exit stairway. A 36-inch clearance of combustibles shall be maintained around all heat producing devices.

Equipment rooms - Combustible material shall not be stored in boiler rooms, mechanical rooms, or electrical rooms.

Electrical panels - All storage shall be kept 36 inches away from all electrical panels. All doors or panels will be latched closed. Blanks shall be placed in open panels. Breakers shall not be taped or held in the on position by any device or made inoperable in any manner. Circuit locks may be used to lock a breaker in the off position. Other devices may be used to prevent a breaker from being turned off but must not interfere with the breaker's normal operation. Electric rooms shall be marked.

Extension cords - Extension cords shall not be utilized as permanent wiring. Extension cords shall only be used on a temporary basis. All cords and equipment shall be listed by a testing laboratory recognized by the State of Maryland.

Power strips - A breaker protected power strip shall be utilized when multiple outlets are needed. Multiple power strips or extension cords shall not be "piggy backed" together to form a longer service. Major appliances such as refrigerators and microwaves shall be plugged directly in an outlet.

Housekeeping - Accumulation of trash, refuse or debris is not permitted either inside or outside. Exterior combustible or flammable material, including dumpsters, shall not be located within 15 feet of the building, structure, or property line.

Fire/Smoke Assemblies - All walls, ceilings, and floor assemblies shall be maintained. Wall openings and pipe chases shall be sealed to the classification of the wall. Ceiling tiles are not permitted to be painted. All ceiling tiles shall be in place.



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Curtains, draperies and decorations – Curtains, draperies and other similar furnishings and decorations shall meet the flame resistance standards outlined by the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Street Address Numbers - The numbers shall be Arabic numbers, at least 6 inches high, on a contrasting background and clearly visible from the street named in the address. Rear access doors shall also have the same size and type address numbers. Assigned suite numbers or letters shall be posted on front and rear doors with numbers or letters at least 2 ½ inches in height.

Knox Box Rapid Entry System – All commercial buildings/businesses not occupied 24-hours a day shall have a Knox Box installed. The Knox Box shall be equipped with entry keys as designated by the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Candles and Open Flame Devices – The use of these devices shall be in accordance with the policies of the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Tents - All tents over 120 ft² require a permit. Tents shall be located a minimum 10 feet from any structure, shall not block any exit from a structure, or be a part of a structure's exit way. All tents shall meet NFPA 701 flame resistance standards. Tents with an occupancy load of 50 or more are classified as an assembly and therefore shall have a minimum of 2 marked exits. When side panels are installed, doors must be a contrasting color. All heating/AC must be approved by OFM.

Section 2

Applies to Assembly Occupancies Only

Unsecured Seating (rows of seats not secured to the floor) – Rows of seating shall have a path of travel not exceeding 30' in length from any seat to an aisle. A minimum of 12 inches shall be maintained between the front of a seat and the back of the seat in the next row. When rows of seats are set up to accommodate more than 200 people, the chairs in each row shall be fastened together. Seating diagrams shall be submitted for approval to the Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM) for occupancies with unsecured seating over 200.

Crowd Managers – All assemblies are required to have at least 1 crowd manager on duty. When the occupant load exceeds 250 persons, 1 crowd manager per 250 persons or fraction thereof is required. The Office of the Fire Marshal provides free crowd manager training.

Occupancy Load – Keep an accurate count of the number of occupants at all times. All areas of assembly shall have a maximum capacity sign issued by the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Fee for Inspections

HCDFRS charges a fee for fire inspections, re-inspections, and any associated services per County Code. You will receive an invoice from the Howard County Office of Finance after the inspection is within compliance and all paperwork has been completed.

This program is important and necessary to safeguard the lives and property of the people we protect. Therefore, we ask for your fullest cooperation in correcting any violations so that together we can improve fire safety.