

Seattle Permits

—part of a multi-departmental series on City services & permitting

Key Boxes for Emergency Access

Updated January 2025

The utilization of a Key Box for Emergency Access is optional except when specifically directed by the Seattle Fire Marshal.

Knox Rapid Entry System

Used by Fire Departments throughout the country, the primary component of the Knox Rapid Entry System is a key box unique to the jurisdiction in which it is located. Only the Seattle Fire Department has the key to open Fire Department access boxes located within our city. Use of the system can improve emergency access to buildings and result in savings by eliminating property damage from Fire Department forced entry.

Use of the Knox Rapid Entry System is authorized by Section 506 of the 2021 Seattle Fire Code. The Code specifies that the Seattle Fire Department (SFD) may require a key box containing access keys be installed at the entrance to structures or areas where access for the purpose of life safety or firefighting is restricted. While the Fire Department can require that a Knox Entry System is installed, in most instances installation of the system will be at the option of the building owner.

The KnoxBox 3200 Series and the KnoxVault 4400 Series (models with hinged doors, single lock, and black in color) are the only boxes approved for new installations in the City of Seattle. The Recessed Mount models are recommended for a more secure installation, but not required. A Knox Multi-Purpose Electrical Switch for tamper detection is another security option that may be installed inside the box. The KnoxBox 3200 may also be utilized to house an Emergency Use Switch for entry gates. Properties with pre-existing Knox models are still valid. However, the key lock core may need to be updated to match the most current City of Seattle Fire Department access key. Additionally, the Seattle Fire Marshal may require the reinstallation or the discontinued use of any KnoxBox/KnoxVault that does not meet secure installation standards. Examples of structures for which a rapid entry key box may be

beneficial include:

- Warehouse, industrial, commercial and other buildings where 24 hour staffing / security is not available.
- Buildings constructed such that SFD forced entry, if required, would be unduly difficult or likely result in significant property damage.
- Buildings with a high frequency of emergency response incidents and where occupants may be endangered due to delays gaining access.
- Hospitals, nursing home and high-rise buildings.
- Hazardous materials occupancies.

How Does it Work?

A building owner purchases, installs, or arranges for installation, of a Knox key box on the exterior of the building at the main entrance point. The box is manufactured with an electronic key core which can be opened only with a key that is issued solely to SFD. Medical aid units and fire trucks in Seattle are each equipped with one KnoxBox key, held in a special security device.

When *emergency* access is required, the SFD fire fighter removes the key from the special security device in their SFD vehicle and opens the KnoxBox to remove the building main entrance key. After use, the SFD fire fighter returns the entrance key to the key box and locks it, and then returns the special KnoxBox key to the security device inside the emergency vehicle.

How to Purchase a KnoxBox

The KnoxBox can be purchased directly from the Knox Company at www.KnoxBox.com and clicking on "PRODUCTS – COMMERCIAL KNOXBOXES" or by calling 1-800-552-5669. When purchasing for Seattle Fire Department access, ensure that you list your location jurisdiction as "Seattle Fire Dept". There are other Seattle agencies that utilize the KnoxBox system, and you do not want to obtain the wrong KnoxBox.

Alternatively, a KnoxBox can be obtained for purchase



and installation from some local locksmiths. You will need to check with your locksmith for availability of a “Seattle Fire Dept” KnoxBox and a price quote.

When ordering either from the Knox Company or from your locksmith, the KnoxBox 3200 Series is the primary box for use with SFD. The KnoxVault 4400 Series is also available for occupancies where large numbers of key sets are to be placed in the box. The KnoxBox 3200 Series and KnoxVault 4400 Series are the only boxes approved for new installations in the City of Seattle. All KnoxBox models will be single lock and in the color of black (unless a variance is approved in advance of purchase). A “Recessed Mount” model is highly recommended for a more secure installation, but not required. A Knox Tamper Switch is also available when ordering but not required in Seattle.

Upon purchase, the KnoxBox will be shipped directly from the manufacturer to the purchaser with the electronic key core, but the hinged door will be locked open for installation by the purchaser.

Properties with pre-existing Knox models may continue to use those models. Upgrading to an electronic core is available by purchase through the Knox Company (see **Electronic Core Upgrade** section below), but it is not required at this time. Additionally, if boxes are not securely mounted, the Seattle Fire Marshal may require a building owner to discontinue using the box or to have the box properly reinstalled.

Employees of the Seattle Fire Department are not allowed to be involved with the direct sale or installation of the Knox Rapid Entry System or any Knox Company product.

Installation Instructions and Requirements

All KnoxBox orders approved and completed through the Knox Company will receive SFD installation instructions. Installation instructions are provided for Hollow Core Walls, Concrete/Masonry Walls, and Post Mounting. If you purchase a KnoxBox from a local locksmith to install on your own and did not receive the SFD installation instructions, you can request them by email at SFD_FMO_KnoxBox@Seattle.gov.

Installation Location

The building owner is responsible for proper installation of the KnoxBox. It must be securely mounted on the building exterior or to a free-standing post at a general height of six feet to the top of the box, and within five feet of the primary SFD access point for the building, such as the addressed main door or metal gate post. Please follow the installation instructions precisely, and only do something that differs from the instructions after you receive pre-approval from your SFD Fire Prevention Division Inspector.

Vehicle and Pedestrian Gates

A KnoxBox may be installed with a multi-purpose electrical switch to control a powered gate. This switch is available from the Knox website in “PRODUCTS – ACCESSORIES”. The gate switch allows Seattle Fire to automatically open the gate during emergency responses.

Scheduling a New Installation Inspection

Once the box is installed, the purchaser should contact SFD to schedule an inspection. Our inspector will meet you at your building. Please request your inspection by emailing SFD_FMO_KnoxBox@Seattle.gov. To prepare for the inspection, please ensure you have a copy of the key to access the building as well as keys to access life safety systems, if these are behind doors that cannot be unlocked by the exterior building key. Do not include keys that provide access to any individual dwellings. During the inspection, our inspector will verify the KnoxBox installation, and if it has been installed appropriately, the inspector will place the building access key(s) in the box. The inspector will initialize the electronic key core and secure the building access key(s). The KnoxBox is intended to contain access keys to enter the building and to access the life safety systems.

Fees

After the inspection, the purchaser completes an Inspection Agreement which authorizes the Seattle Fire Department to invoice an inspection fee of \$358 (current as of 2025) per box. This fee offsets costs for box inspection, either installation of a manual key core or initialization of the electronic core, and administrative services for handling and administering the Knox program. A fee of \$358 will also be charged for each additional on-site consult or service provided by the Fire Marshal inspector. (Exception—described further below—there is no charge for SFD on-site help to swap out old keys and replace with new keys). While the Knox Rapid Entry System is the only emergency access key box approved by City of Seattle, it is still optional to have an emergency access key box unless directed by the Fire Marshal.

Updating Building Keys in the Future

If your building is rekeyed or if you have other reason to modify the key for the exterior lock that provides access to your building, or any other key that is required to access fire protection systems in the building, please contact us at SFD_FMO_KnoxBox@Seattle.gov so we can arrange a time for your local Fire Station to meet with you and “swap out” the keys. We will record your

government issued identification before returning the key to you, and we will also require you to demonstrate that you have a copy of a key in your possession that opens the locked door. There is no cost for this service.

Electronic Core Upgrade

Upgrading your locking core from a mechanical key core to an electronic locking core (eLock) is available to those who have an existing KnoxBox in use. Your cost will include the cost of the eLock from the Knox Company as well as the Seattle inspection fee of \$358. You can order the upgrade through the Knox Company by selecting the “Buy” button in the upper right corner of their website. Then selecting your jurisdiction location of Seattle Fire Dept to get to the “Seattle Fire Dept eLock Core Retrokit ONLY” product tab. Enter the corresponding installation address, and proceed to checkout for an eApproval.

Status of Key Boxes Other Than the KnoxBox

When a building owner has voluntarily provided a key box and the box is not a KnoxBox/KnoxVault, the owner will be asked if they still desire that SFD has a key access to the occupancy. If the answer is yes, the owner will be directed to replace the existing key box with a Knox key box. SFD will no longer use any access key box other than the Knox Rapid Entry System.

Elevator Key Boxes

While the Seattle Fire Dept accesses the Elevator Boxes during emergencies, the Elevator Key Boxes (Knox 1400 model) are managed and inspected by the Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI) Conveyance Office.

Any questions or concerns regarding the purchase, installation, or theft/damage of elevator key boxes should be directed to Elevator Inspectors Support Staff at SCI_Elevator@Seattle.gov.

Seattle Fire Dept Contact

Seattle Fire Prevention Division
KnoxBox Team
SFD_FMO_KnoxBox@seattle.gov