

Seattle Permits

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

Fire Watch and Out of Service Fire Protection Systems

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A “fire watch” is a temporary measure intended to ensure continuous and systematic surveillance of a building or part of a building by one or more qualified individuals. The purpose of a fire watch is to control fire hazards, detect early signs of unwanted fire, raise an alarm in case of fire and notify the fire department.

When is a Fire Watch Required?

A fire watch is required whenever a fire protection system is out of service. Fire protection systems include fire alarms and fire sprinklers. The impairment can be a planned impairment (for example, a planned decision to take a fire alarm system off line for several hours to perform scheduled maintenance) or the system may experience an emergency impairment (for example, when a fire pump fails).

In addition, if a fire alarm system experiences an excessive number of accidental activations or nuisance alarms, a building owner (or their representative) may be required by the Seattle Fire Department to provide a fire watch until the system is repaired.

For exceptions to the fire watch requirement, please see “Fire Watch Exceptions” on the last page.

Owner Responsibilities

Building owners are responsible for ensuring that their building’s fire protection systems are tested at required intervals (see [Client Assistance Memorandum \(CAM\) #5971](#) “Testing of Fire Protection Systems and Emergency Responder Amplification Systems”) and maintained in good working order.

Building owners are also responsible for ensuring they have identified personnel who are available and trained to serve as fire watch in case of need. See the section on

Fire Watch Duties below.

When a fire protection system is **out of service for any length of time**, building owners must ensure several actions take place. These steps may be performed by the building owner, a designated impairment coordinator, or by an SFD-certified technician:

1. Notify the building manager, if applicable.
2. Notify the alarm monitoring company.
3. Notify tenants in the areas of the building that are affected by the impairment, and provide an estimate of how long the systems are likely to be out of service.
4. Contact the repair company to fix the fire protection system(s).
5. Notify the insurance carrier.
6. Implement a fire watch—see tables 1 and 2.

In addition, if a fire protection system is anticipated to be **out of service for eight or more hours**, building owners or impairment coordinators must also:

- ◆ Notify the Seattle Fire Department.

See [CAM 5971](#) for information on the notification process and required timelines.

Fire Watch Duties

Fire watch personnel shall perform the following duties:

1. Continuously patrol all areas of the building where the fire protection system is impaired, or the entire building if the fire alarm system is impaired. All applicable areas of the building shall be visited at least once every 15 minutes. NOTE: Fire watch patrols are limited to the building common areas and building facilities such as laundry, maintenance, and storage areas in residential (R) occupancies. Fire watch patrol is not expected to enter private apartment or hotel units.



2. Identify any fire, life or property hazards.
3. Notify the Seattle Fire Department if a fire is discovered by calling 9-1-1 with the exact address and type of emergency.
4. Notify occupants of the facility of the need to evacuate. If the sirens or public address function of the alarm system are still functional, use them to assist with evacuation of the building.
5. Determine at least one means of direct communication with the Fire Department. A telephone is acceptable.
6. Maintain a log of fire watch activities. See “Record Keeping” below for more information.
7. Have knowledge of the location and use of fire protection equipment, such as fire extinguishers.
8. In buildings with occupancy type A (Assemblies), R (Residential), I (Institutional) and E (Education) occupancies, fire watch personnel cannot have other duties besides their assigned fire watch. In other words, building occupants performing their regular duties cannot serve as a fire watch.

The fire watch will not perform fire-fighting duties beyond the scope of the ordinary citizen.

Fire Watch Personnel Requirements

The building owner determines the personnel who conduct the fire watch. A professional security company is not required.

Dedicated Fire Watch

A dedicated fire watch is the most common type of fire watch required. This is a dedicated position serving as fire watch and not performing other duties. The dedicated fire watch must remain on duty and continuously patrol the areas of the building where the system is impaired, or the whole building if the fire alarm is impaired.

A dedicated fire watch is required at all times day and night when a fire protection system is impaired in the building “occupancy types” listed in Table 1.

Fire Watch

Building occupants performing their regular duties, including construction workers, are acceptable in lieu of a dedicated fire watch in building “occupancy types” listed in Table 2. In this case, building occupants must be notified of

the impairment and of their responsibility to call 9-1-1 in case of fire. These conditions are required during the times affected buildings are open for general occupancy, open to the public, or as otherwise required by the fire code official.

Table 1: Dedicated Fire Watch Required At All Times of Day and Night When Fire Protection Systems are Impaired

Occupancy	Description
A	Assembly occupancies, posted occ load > 50
R-1, R-2, R-3	Hotels, apartments and congregate residences
I	Nursing homes, hospitals, day treatment centers, health care facilities providing care which renders patients incapable of self-preservation, jails
E	Schools through the 12th grade, preschools, day care centers with 6+ children

Table 2: Fire Watch Required When Fire Protection Systems Are Impaired, Whenever Building Is Occupied

Occupancy	Description
B	Offices, Eating/drinking establishments with posted occ load < 50
M	Stores accessible to the public
H	Occupancies with hazardous materials
F-1, F-2, S-1, S-2, U	Moderate hazard factory, industrial, storage, utility & misc. occupancies

Record Keeping

A fire watch log should be maintained at the facility. The log must be available to the Seattle Fire Department at all times during the fire watch. The log should show the following:

1. Address of the facility.
2. Description of fire watch duties (e.g. patrol route, systems to check, hazards to check).

3. Running list of persons conducting patrol, including name, starting and ending time of patrol shift, and signature.
4. Record of communication(s) to the Fire Department and monitoring company.
5. Record of other information as directed by Fire Department personnel.

See SFD [Administrative Rule 9.04](#) for more information on record keeping and the fire watch log.

Cancellation of Fire Watch

It is the owners' responsibility to cancel the fire watch once the fire protection system has been restored to service. A fire protection system is considered restored to service when a test conducted by an SFD-certified technician confirms that the system functions as designed. At this point, the technician should remove the red tag and place a white tag on the system. The technician is also required to email a copy of the normal test record to our team so we know the impairment has been resolved (email SFD_Impairments@seattle.gov) and formally submit the report to the Seattle Fire Department within seven days using the standard reporting process (www.thecomplianceengine.com).

For additional information about fire protection systems or impaired systems notification procedures, visit the Fire Prevention Division website at <http://www.seattle.gov/fire/systemstesting> or contact the Fire Prevention Division Impaired Systems Team at (206) 386-1350.

Exceptions to Fire Watch Requirements

A dedicated fire watch, or other approved mitigation, is required for impairments to fire protection systems of any length, unless exempted in [Administrative Rule 9.04](#) or as determined by the fire code official. Impaired emergency responder radio amplification systems do not require fire watch.

Appliances that are protected by range hoods including kitchen appliances and spray booths shall not be used while the range hood is impaired except with approval from the Fire Marshal's Office. For this reason, when appliances are not being used, fire watch is not required for impaired range hoods.