

Seattle Fire Prevention Division

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Tents and Heaters for Outdoor Dining and Activities: SFD Safety and Permit Guidelines

Tents can be dangerous if they catch fire or collapse. For this reason, larger tents are regulated by the Fire and Building Codes. Heaters can also pose risks, whether the heat is provided by propane/Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), diesel, or electricity. This document presents a summary of code requirements as well as special streamlined permitting and rules in effect during the COVID pandemic and recovery.

TENTS

You need a Seattle Fire Department (SFD) permit for using a temporary tent, canopy, or air-supported structure if:

- The structure is bigger than 400 square feet and has one or more walls; OR,
- The structure is bigger than 700 square feet with no walls (roof-only canopies).
- You have two or more small roof-only tents that are placed side by side less than 12 feet apart and their total area is bigger than 700 square feet.

The permit includes conditions you must follow regarding tent materials and installation to comply with safety requirements in the fire code. The permit is good for 28 days. If your tent meets or exceeds the size limits above and will be used for longer than 28 days, after receiving your SFD temporary tent permit, you can contact the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections at <https://www.seattle.gov/sdci/permits> for permitting. Awnings also require permits from SDCI and are not handled by SFD.

Make Sure Your Tent Can Be Approved by the Fire Marshal If you are purchasing a tent greater than 400 sq feet, please ensure that it meets flame retardant standards in the fire code (see permit condition #8 on the last page). You will be required to accept responsibility and liability for the proper installation of the tent per industry standards and/or manufacturer's installation instructions. Temporary tents should not be occupied during periods of snow or ice accumulation unless designed for full structural loading per the Seattle Building Code. Smaller tents should be removed during snow and ice accumulation and wind events. Tents rented through a reputable tent rental company will meet fire code standards and the tent company will assume liability for proper installation.

Should I Choose a Tent Without Walls? For ventilation reasons, during the pandemic, government restrictions sometimes required zero, one, two or more walls. You may wish to take this into consideration when purchasing or renting a tent, as it is unknown whether future variants will cause a return to these restrictions.

In addition, there are also fire code impacts of choosing a tent with or without walls: If your tent has no walls, you only need an SFD permit if your tent is larger than 700 square feet, or you have tents side by side closer than 12 feet apart with total area exceeding 700 square feet. However, if you add walls to your tent, then smaller tents will require an SFD permit, too. If your tent has any walls, a permit is required for tents 400 square feet or greater. Tents used for Farmers Markets have somewhat different requirements, please see conditions for the 2500-FM permit here:

<https://web.seattle.gov/sfd/permitsearch/SearchbyAllPermit.asp>.

How Close to a Building Can a Tent be Installed? For example, Tents Covering Sidewalk Dining Tables SFD generally requires a set-back between tents and buildings of a minimum of 12 feet.

What are the Full Permit Conditions for a Temporary Tent? You may reference permit conditions for tents on our website. See the 3201 permit series here:

<https://web.seattle.gov/sfd/permitsearch/SearchbyAllPermit.asp>.

OUTDOOR HEATING AND LIGHTING

Propane (LPG) and Diesel-Fueled Heaters Require a Permit and Fuel Tanks are Not Allowed Inside Tents.

This means “mushroom” heaters are allowed 10 feet away from tents, but are prohibited inside tents.

“Salamander” style heaters which blow air in under a tent from the outside are permitted and are usually available from tent rental companies. The fuel tank must be a minimum 10 feet away from the tent and exits and you must have 2A-40BC fire extinguishers.

If you rent an LPG/propane or diesel heater from a tent rental company, that company will usually have the required SFD propane/diesel heater permit, and you will not need an additional permit. They should also provide required fire extinguishers. If you are purchasing your own LPG/propane or diesel heaters, you will need an SFD permit.

SFD issues a temporary Propane/LPG heating permit (permit code 8207) and a diesel permits (permit code 1102) to meet your different heating needs.

Electric Heaters and Lighting are allowed outside as well as inside tents and do not require a separate permit from SFD. However, they must be plugged into an approved electrical outlet.

For more information, please contact the SFD Permits Unit at permits@seattle.gov. Interpretation services are available. Please feel free to request a call with someone who speaks your language – just tell us which language and your phone number.