

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001



**FIRE MARSHAL'S ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTIVE**

**05-07**

**(Directive 06-01 is RESCINDED)**

**Gary L. Palmer, Jr. – Fire Marshal**

**FIRE WATCH GUIDELINES**

**April 26, 2007**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this Fire Marshal Administrative Directive is to provide a uniform guide for a fire watch when required by the Office of the Fire Marshal.

**Authority:**

Title 12H DCMR D.C. Construction Code Supplement of 2003 and the 2000 Edition of the International Code Council (ICC) International Fire Code and International Building Code.

**Definition:**

A fire watch is a short-term, emergency measure to provide an acceptable level of life safety in an unsafe or hazardous conditions(s) existing in a building(s) or structure(s). A fire watch is a compensatory measure only. It is intended to allow continued occupancy of a building or facility that may not be safe to be occupied during the time period required for implementing appropriate changes or repairs. The purpose of the fire watch is to check ALL areas of the building on a regular basis to detect fire/life safety emergencies and provide prompt notification to 911 along with the building occupants of the appropriate actions to be taken.

**Required:**

A fire watch is required to be implemented immediately when certain conditions are discovered, either by the facility manager or by the Fire Marshal. Examples of when a fire watch will be required by the DC Fire and EMS Department, Office of the Fire Marshal include, but are not limited to:

- Outages for maintenance (four hours or longer), significant impairment of, or out of service fire alarm system.
- Outages for maintenance (four hours or longer), significant impairment of, or out of service fire suppression system.
- Blocked or locked means of egress and /or exit.
- Hazardous or dangerous conditions that create an immediate life hazard. (This condition shall require notification to 911)

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Different occupancies have different levels of risk which are determined by the relative vulnerability of the occupants. It is not appropriate to treat all occupancies the same, therefore each situation shall be evaluated individually and the above examples are not proscriptive. Outages for maintenance shall be reviewed for the length of time involved to perform the work.

**Procedures:**

The fire watch, whether ordered by the Fire Marshal, or requested by the building representative, shall be contained in a detailed written plan. Upon the completion of the written plan, the building contact/responsible party shall submit the plan for approval to the Office of the Fire Marshal, located at 441 4<sup>th</sup> St. NW, Suite 370, Washington, DC 20001 prior to the close of business. This plan may be faxed to 202-727-3238, attention the "Fire Marshal." Any documents faxed should be preceded by a phone call to 202-727-1614. The business hours of the Fire Marshal Office are 8:15 am to 4:45 pm, Monday through Friday. If the fire watch is required after normal business hours, the responsible party shall prepare the plan and be guided by the Fire Marshal Representative on the scene.

**Plans:**

The fire watch plan submitted for approval shall include, but not limited to the following information:

1. Contract from a licensed monitoring/security company providing fire watch duties, and notation that personnel will only be utilized for fire watch duties.
2. Estimated duration of fire watch, estimated time for completion of repairs, estimated time for removal of hazardous conditions, or other specific situations which required the implementation of the fire watch. Note: In general fire watch in residential buildings will remain in place for 24 hours a day, and for commercial buildings will only be required while the building is occupied. The duration of the fire watch will be approved by the Fire Marshal.
3. Methods that will be utilized for identifying the fire watch personnel. The method of identification can be a vest, armband, highly visible shirt, or any other approved means.
4. Methods of communication to be used by fire watch personnel. Fire watch personnel are required to have radio communications between each other. This may be accomplished by the use of cell phones, direct connect, portable radios, etc.
5. Procedure to be used to rapidly notify the Fire Department and building occupants in the event of an emergency.
6. Number of personnel required to sufficiently conduct inspection of all areas of the building, and allow for employee breaks. Fire watch personnel shall check the building at least hourly. More frequent checks may be mandated if required by the Fire Marshal.

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7. Special attention shall be paid to storage areas, janitor closets, utility spaces, basements, attics, penthouses, etc. and other normally unoccupied areas.
8. Identification of inspection routes to be utilized by fire watch personnel. Note: No partial fire watch patrols are permitted. The entire building must be patrolled.
9. Experience of personnel being utilized for fire watch. Fire watch personnel shall be familiar with the property being protected, including: hazards, occupancies, fixed fire protection systems, manual and automatic detection and alarm systems.
10. Provide method to be utilized to record history of fire watch activities. (Provide example of log book, inspection forms, etc.)
11. Plan shall include a written acknowledgement statement that indicates the building contact/responsible party understands that the guidelines must be adhered to as approved, and if compliance is not maintained, the fire watch approval will be voided, and appropriate action will be taken in accordance with IFC.

**Cancellation of Fire Watch:**

It is the owners' responsibility to request the "fire watch" be discontinued once the fire protection system has been fully restored or the hazardous situation has been abated. If the owner has received a "Notice of Violation", a re-inspection must be requested through the Office of the Fire Marshal. The fire watch shall "not" be discontinued until the fire department provides written authorization to stop or discontinue it.

Random checks may be made by Fire Marshal personnel to ensure all of the above provisions are being complied with.

**Note:**

The DC Fire & EMS Department, Office of the Fire Marshal recognizes NFPA 25, Inspection, Testing and Maintenance of Water-Based Fire Protection Systems, and does not consider the testing and maintenance of fire protection systems to be an "outage" if the system is restored within four (4) hours.



Gary L. Palmer, Jr.  
Fire Marshal