



South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation
Division of Fire and Life Safety • Office of State Fire Marshal
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FIRE AND LIFE SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS HAUNTED HOUSES

During the fall season, especially during Halloween, community groups, schools, and amusement organizations design, setup, and operate temporary haunted houses, scare houses, or Halloween-themed occupancies intended to amuse and entertain occupants. In many cases, these temporary “haunted house” operations are configured in a manner that potentially increase the risk to occupants because of audio-visual special effects, reduced lighting, combustible materials, and confused and/or maze-like means of egress arrangements.

In an effort to minimize the risk to occupants of these seasonal attractions, while meeting the intent of the International Fire Code, the State Fire Marshal’s Office has established the following public safety planning procedures and general fire safety guidelines. These are intended to assist planners and operators of temporary haunted houses while maintaining a higher level of fire and life safety and reducing risk to the occupants.

This publication does not replace, nor supersede, any provisions of the International Fire Code or other codes and/or ordinances.

FIRE SAFETY GUIDELINES

The following is only a partial list of the International Fire Code safety requirements and prohibitions commonly associated with temporary haunted houses open to the public:

WRITTEN EMERGENCY PLAN & FACILITY LAYOUT PLAN (2012 IFC 404)

A written emergency and facility layout plan should be in place (see attachments).

PORTABLE GENERATORS (2012 IFC 906, 1003)

Portable generators should not block any means of egress, and be located outside at least 20 feet away from the building, and have an approved fire extinguisher in close proximity.

FIRE WATCH PERSONNEL (2012 IFC Section 403)

As previously mentioned, temporary haunted houses can create potential fire and life-safety hazards to occupants due to special effects, reduced lighting, combustible materials, and maze-like means of egress arrangements. These arrangements may also adversely affect public safety services. It is our recommendation operators of temporary haunted houses open to the public provide fire watch personnel as prescribed below. Additionally, all haunted house attendants and staff members should be trained in the duties listed below - in addition to the procedures outlined in the written emergency plan.

In accordance with the International Fire Code, the owner, agent or lessee should consider providing one or more fire watch personnel, to remain on duty during the times haunted houses are in operation.

FIRE WATCH DUTIES

Fire watch personnel shall keep diligent watch for fires, obstructions to means of egress and other hazards during the time haunted houses are open to the public and take prompt measures for remediation of hazards, extinguishment of fires that occur and assist in the evacuation of occupants from the structures. Fire watch personnel should have a means of contacting 9-1-1 and alerting other staff members in the event of an emergency.

FIRE DEPARTMENT NOTIFICATION (2012 IFC 401, 901, and 2703)

In accordance with the International Fire Code, notification of emergency responders (i.e., Fire Department) should be as follows:

- Fire Events
In the event an unwanted fire occurs on a property, the owner or occupant shall immediately notify the fire department (911) and implement the evacuation plan.
- Alarm Activations
Upon activation of a fire alarm signal, employees or staff shall immediately notify the fire department (911) and implement the evacuation plan.
- Hazardous Materials Release
Any person who witnesses, discovers, or otherwise has knowledge of a spill, leak, or other release of a hazardous material or other material that may negatively impact the environment, regardless of quantity, shall immediately report such spill, leak or release to the Fire Department by calling 911.
- Out-of-Service Fire Protection Systems
Where a fire protection system is broken and/or out-of-service for other than routine maintenance, the fire department and the fire code official shall be notified immediately. The building owner is generally responsible for this.
- Delayed Notification Prohibited
A person shall not, by verbal or written directive, require any delay in the reporting of a fire to the fire department.
- False Report Prohibited
It is unlawful for a person to give, signal, or transmit a false alarm.
- Interference with Fire Department Operations Prohibited
It is unlawful to interfere with, attempt to interfere with, conspire to interfere with, obstruct or restrict the mobility of or block the path of travel of a fire department emergency vehicle in any way, or to interfere with, attempt to interfere with, conspire to interfere with, obstruct or hamper any fire department operation.

FIRE PROTECTION EQUIPMENT & SYSTEMS SHALL BE OPERATIONAL (2012 IFC 907)

Fire protection equipment and warning devices such as fire alarm panel(s), fire sprinkler heads, fire department hose connections, manual pull stations, audible and visual alarm devices (e.g., horns, speakers, strobes), and portable fire extinguishers shall not be obstructed from immediate access, view, and/or operation by any decorative material, displays, equipment, furnishings, or storage.

MAINTAIN EMERGENCY ACCESS - FIRE LANES SHALL NOT BE BLOCKED (2012 IFC 503)

- Emergency vehicle access to the building or event facility should be maintained at all times.
- If the facility has designated and approved fire lanes, it is unlawful to park or obstruct such designated fire lanes.
- When planning for parking, advise all attendees to observe fire lane regulations.

- Parking should be prohibited within 15' feet of a fire hydrant.
- Identify the best locations for ambulance access to building entry doorways to help expedite emergency medical service when needed.

MAINTAIN EXITS - LOCKED & BLOCKED EGRESS DOORS ARE PROHIBITED (2012 IFC 1003, 1006)

- Decorations or other objects should not be placed in any way that would obstruct any exit.
- Required exits should be continuously maintained free from obstructions or impediments to allow instant use in the case of fire or other emergency.
- Exit doors should be readily operable from the inside without the use of a key or special knowledge, special or effort.
- Exit access aisles and passageways should be maintained clear.
- Exit enclosures, exit stairwells, and exit corridors should be kept free of obstructions, combustible materials, tables and chairs, decorations, displays, storage, and people, and should be accessible for egress at all times.
- All exit signs should be illuminated and clearly visible.
- Emergency lighting should be maintained and operational.

PROTECT OCCUPANTS FROM FIRE - ELIMINATE IGNITION SOURCES (2012 IFC 308, 403, 907)

- Candles and open-flame lanterns shall be prohibited inside temporary haunted houses.
- Self-contained decorative open-flame devices may be used outside of the temporary haunted house only with approval of the local fire official.
- Smoking shall only be permitted outside and away from the temporary haunted house in approved, designated smoking areas.
- Portable open-flame heaters shall be prohibited inside temporary haunted houses.
- Vapor or smoke producing effects, such as smoke machines, should not be permitted in temporary haunted houses due to the possibility of fire alarm activation, obscuring of exits and exit signs, and the possibility of increased panic in an emergency.
- In the event of fire alarm activation or any emergency, a plan should be in place to turn on the building lighting, and immediately stop all music, noise, and other special effects. This procedure should be identified in the written emergency plan.
- Unless specifically approved by the State Fire Marshal, fireworks, pyrotechnics and flame-effects before an audience are prohibited inside and outside the temporary haunted house.

PROTECT OCCUPANTS FROM ELECTRICAL HAZARDS - ENSURE CODE COMPLIANT ELECTRICAL SOURCES (2012 IFC 605)

- Use of unlisted electrical wiring and lighting on natural cut trees and artificial decorative vegetation should be prohibited. Electrical wiring and lighting should be listed and should be used according to manufacturer's instructions. The term "Listed" means equipment or materials included on a list published by an approved testing laboratory, inspection agency or other organization, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL), concerned with product safety evaluation and testing. Listed lighting decorations may be used as long as contact is not made with any combustible material.
- Lights with loose sockets, frayed or bare wires, and lights that produce excessive heat or other dangerous conditions shall be prohibited.
- Extension cords must be of the heavy-duty type, should not be plugged together to make longer cords, and should not be overloaded. Extension cords should not be extended through walls or ceilings, or under floor coverings.

- Extension cords with excessive physical damage and/or frayed or bare wires shall be prohibited, and should be located and secured to prevent creating a trip hazard.
- The use of unapproved electrical wiring such as “zip cord” in the arrangement or application of temporary theatrical style lighting should be prohibited.
- The use of electrical wiring, devices, appliances and other equipment that is modified or damaged and constitutes an electrical shock or fire hazard shall be prohibited. Open junction boxes and open-wiring splices in electrical circuits and wiring shall be prohibited.

PROTECT THE OCCUPANTS FROM FIRE - ENSURE MATERIALS ARE FIRE RETARDENT (2012 IFC 803, 804, 807)

- Decorations shall not be attached or suspended from any ceiling or wall-mounted fire and life-safety devices (e.g., sprinklers, exit signs, emergency lighting, alarm devices, etc.).
- Decorations should not obstruct the visibility or access to any emergency exit, nor reduce the required minimum clear width of any part of the means of egress.
- Decorative materials such as curtains, draperies, hangings, and other materials suspended from walls and ceilings should meet the flame propagation performance criteria of NFPA 701 or be noncombustible. Where required to be flame resistant or flame-retardant, decorative materials should be tested by an approved agency and meet the flame propagation performance criteria of NFPA 701. Reports of test results should be prepared in accordance with NFPA 701 and furnished to the fire code official upon request. Be prepared to provide this information in the public safety plan.
- The permissible amount of decorative materials suspended from walls and ceilings, meeting the flame propagation criteria of NFPA 701 should not exceed 10 percent of the specific wall or ceiling area to which it is attached.
- Artificial vegetation should be certified flame-resistant or flame-retardant in accordance with flame propagation performance criteria of NFPA 701.
- Flammable natural vegetation materials such as batting, cloth, cotton, hay, stalks, straw, vines, leaves, trees, moss, and similar items should not be used for decorative purposes in show windows, building lobbies, exits, exit access, or other parts of buildings, or any area of public use in such a quantity as to constitute a fire hazard. Natural cut trees and other natural vegetation should be in accordance with Chapter 8 of the International Fire Code.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR ASSISTANCE:
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