

FIRE DEPARTMENT VARIANCE OF GENERAL APPLICATION Case No. F-2001-007		CODE OF GENERAL ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA <hr/> TITLE 4 — BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND OCCUPANCY CODE
SUBJECT OF VARIANCE: <div style="text-align: center;"> PUBLIC MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS MANUAL FIRE ALARM BOXES </div>		CURRENT REFERENCED CODE SECTION(S): <div style="text-align: center;"> F-503.2 F-504.1 </div>
CODE AND SECTION(S) AT ISSUE <i>Philadelphia Fire Prevention Code [Effective 9/15/97] — F-503.2 & F-504.1</i> DATE:		
ISSUED BY: Harold B. Hairston, Commissioner RECOMMENDED BY: Board of Safety and Fire Prevention	ISSUE DATE: <div style="text-align: center;">April 27, 2001</div>	<div style="text-align: center;">PAGE 1 OF 2</div>

DISCUSSION:

The *Philadelphia Fire Prevention Code* Section F-504.1 states in part:

“All fire protection systems which were installed in compliance with any law, ordinance or order, shall be maintained in an operative condition at all times. An owner or occupant shall not reduce the effectiveness of the protection so required...”

Section F-503.2 states in part:

“A fire alarm system shall be installed in existing buildings as required by Sections B-918.4.1 through B-918.4.5 of the building code...”

Section B-918.4.1 of the *Philadelphia Building Code* states in part:

“A fire alarm system shall be installed and maintained in all occupancies in Use Group A-4 or E (*schools*)...”

The School District of Philadelphia appeared before the Board of Safety and Fire Prevention (Board) on Tuesday, April 10, 2001 and requested a variance to remove manual fire alarm boxes (pull stations) in middle and high schools where the boxes are subject to a high rate of false alarms (alarms without basis and with malicious intent).

The variance request relates to 40 middle schools and 39 high schools. Building construction and size vary at each school. The typical construction is masonry. Building contents are typically classroom and office furnishings and maintenance equipment.

Fire protection equipment in the schools varies. All schools have manual fire alarm systems and portable fire extinguishers. Some newer or remodeled schools have areas protected by smoke detection or sprinkler systems.

School District representatives stated at the variance hearing that the variance is needed due to the daily abuse of the manual fire alarm boxes and disruption of school functions. The representatives indicated that boxes shall only be removed from schools with public address systems, two-way communication between the classrooms and the main office and staff with portable communication equipment. They also indicated that one manual fire alarm box will

be in service in the following areas of each school: main office, main entrance, auditorium, gymnasium, each child care area, cafeteria and heater room.

VARIANCE:

The Board reviewed the request and recommended that a Variance of General Application be granted for all public middle and high schools for the removal of manual fire alarm boxes. The following are provisions of the variance to ensure fire safety in the schools:

1. At least one manual fire alarm box shall be in service at each of the following areas: main office, main entrance, auditorium, gymnasium area, each child care area, cafeteria and heater room.
2. There shall be the following communications at each school:
 - A. A public address system.
 - B. Two-way communications (telephones) between classrooms and other normally occupied spaces and the main office.
 - C. Staff members shall have portable radios (walkie-talkies).
3. During normal school hours, the main office shall be constantly attended to ensure prompt notification to building occupants and the Fire Department of a fire emergency.
4. During after school hours when a building is occupied and no one is in the main office, all persons in the building shall be notified by staff of the location of all manual fire alarm boxes in areas they occupy and the location of at least one staff member who can activate the building's fire alarm and call the Fire Department in the event of a fire emergency.

I hereby approve the Board's recommendations.