

FAQ: Do I need a Fire Watch?

What is a fire watch?

A fire watch is an inspection performed by trained individuals to notify the fire department, and/or occupants of a building of an emergency due to the absence of fire protection systems.

When do I need a fire watch?

A fire watch is required during the following situations:

- When a fire protection system is disabled due to repair or upgrade in an existing building.
- When a new construction classified as Type III, Type IV, or Type V building reaches 40 feet in height.
- When a new construction classified as Type III, Type IV, or Type V building includes an aggregate area exceeding 50,000 square feet.
- Hot work activity occurs within the building.
- When other hazardous activity occurs, as determined by the Site Safety Manager, Fire Code Official, or the courts.

What will I need if my project falls within the parameters for requiring a fire watch?

A fire site safety plan is required to be submitted and reviewed by the building official prior to starting any work on the site. You will also be required to have a Site Safety Manager responsible for enforcing compliance with the site safety plan.

What is a site safety plan?

A site safety plan is details of the fire prevention program for the construction site. The following information is required on the site safety plan:

- Name and contact information of the Site Safety Manager or designee responsible for fire prevention program.
- Training of the fire watch personnel.
- Procedures for reporting emergencies.
- Location of fire protection equipment, including portable fire extinguishers, standpipes, fire department connections, and fire hydrants.
- Fire Department access routes, during and after hours.
- Smoking and cooking policy, designated areas to be used when approved, and signage locations in accordance with Chapter 33 of the Philadelphia Fire Code.
- Location and safety considerations for temporary heating equipment.
- Hot work plan.
- Plans for control of combustible waste material.
- Locations and methods for storage and use of flammable and combustible liquids and other hazardous materials.
- Provisions for site security after hours, including but not limited to standard fencing and lock-out details, remote monitoring services and other technology, or live personnel.
- Emergency Egress plan, including location of exits/egress points.

When does the fire watch need to be performed?

At a minimum, a fire watch shall be maintained at the following times:

- During an emergency or planned impairment of a fire protection system.
- During and at least 30 minutes after the conclusion of hot work activity.
- During non-working hours from the time that combustible construction reaches a height above 40 feet or an area of 50,000 square feet until the fire alarm or fire suppression system has been certified.

What are the requirements for performing the fire watch?

A fire watch shall meet the following criteria:

- The primary duty of fire watch personnel shall be to perform constant patrols and watch for the occurrence of fire. The combination of fire watch duties and security duties is acceptable.
- Fire watch personnel shall be trained in all duties and responsibilities outlined in the Site Safety Plan.
- Fire watch personnel shall be provided with at least one approved means for notification to the Fire Department, including but not limited to a cellular phone.
- An adequate number of fire watch personnel shall be on duty to ensure that all areas of a property are inspected every 30 minutes. In multi-story buildings there shall be at least one fire watch for every five floors.
- In the event that the fire watch observes smoke or fire, the Fire Department shall be notified immediately.
- Maintain a record of all time periods of duty, including the log entry each time the site was patrolled, and each time a structure was entered and inspected. Records shall be made available for review by the Fire Code Official upon request.

What sort of records must be kept for the fire watch?

The site safety plan must be kept on site at all times and logbooks are required to be maintained and made available to the department upon request. Failure to produce accurate logbooks or the site safety plan may result in a violation, fine or a cease operations order being issued for the premises.

Do I need a fire watch when I test, service or require my annual certification for my system?

Fire Alarm Systems:

A fire watch is not required if you are testing fire alarm systems for periods not to exceed one hour or when performing the annual fire alarm system certification, and as long as the testing is performed by a qualified contractor or fire alarm inspector licensed by the City of Philadelphia.

Fire Suppression Systems:

Sprinkler systems may only be taken out of service when the system itself is undergoing required service or improvements. No more than 2 contiguous floors of the sprinkler system will be taken out of service at any one time with one of the following fire safety measures established:

- Smoke detection shall remain in service and shall be monitored.
 - Dual functioning heat detectors shall be installed. Both fixed temperature and rate-of-rise functions shall be operational, and the system shall be monitored.
 - A fire watch shall be established. The fire watch requirements are found in Section 901.7 of the Fire Code.
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Questions? Call 311 or (215) 686-8686 (if outside Philadelphia) or submit an online form via <http://www.phila.gov/li/get-help>.

Disclaimer:

This interpretation, policy or code application is intended to provide guidance to staff for consistency of review and is subject to change without notice. Application of this interpretation, policy or code application to specific projects may vary. There may be other ways to comply with the Code. If so, you are not required to use this method. You may want to investigate other options or consult with a professional identifying an equally code compliant solution.