

SOMERSWORTH FIRE DEPARTMENT

FIRE SAFETY/EMERGENCY TIPS

[SEE SOMERSWORTH.COM FOR RELEVANT SEASONAL FIRE SAFETY INFORMATION AND THE STATE HSEM WEBSITE FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT INFORMATION FOR WEATHER AND DISASTER EVENTS]

THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE UTILIZES RSA 153, 155 AND Saf-C 6000 laws and regulations in determining fire safety parameters in and outside buildings. NFPA 101 (2015 edition) and NFPA 1 (2015 edition) are utilized by reference.

BUSINESS

- Consult the State Fire Code and Building Code to determine if your business requires a fire alarm signaling system and sprinkler system for protection of occupants and the structure.
- If it does, the state requires these systems to be maintained and inspected annually by a licensed fire protection firm. Records of these tests need to be maintained.
- Most likely portable fire extinguishers are required on the premises. Again, these devices need to be inspected annually by a licensed fire protection firm. Records of these tests need to be maintained.
- “EXIT” and emergency lighting also is required by code and these devices are required to be maintained at all times.
- If you are contemplating a renovation or addition to a building, plans need to be submitted to Development Services in City Hall. PERMITS need to be obtained after plans are approved. Fire Department PERMITS are for “Fire Protection Devices”: “Oil Burners”: “Tank Removal”. There are fees associated with these PERMITS, as there are fees associated with general Permits that need to be obtained from Development Services.
Any fire protection system (fire alarm; sprinkler, commercial kitchen system, carbon dioxide, dry chemical or inergen fire protection system) plans will be reviewed by the Somersworth Fire Department and a written approval forwarded to the contractor submitting the plans.
- If you have public assembly space(s) of more than 50 persons, the state requires that you obtain an “Assembly PERMIT”. These are issued by the municipal Fire Departments on a 6 month or an annual basis.
- Businesses that hold public assembly events need to have pre-planned evacuation routes and announce these to the public before any event. Businesses that hold public events need to have at least one certified “Crowd Manager” on the premises. Events with more than 250 people need two certified “Crowd Managers” in attendance. People can be certified as a “Crowd Manager” by contacting crowdmanagers.com/training or the State Fire Marshal’s Office.
- Businesses that have aisles with goods and services attached thereto need to maintain widths prescribed in NFPA 1 and NFPA 101.
- Businesses may have “hazardous materials” as stock items or employed in the manufacture of goods or services. NFPA 1 will have amounts of these materials (in gallons or pounds) that can be stored within structures or will need special containment.
- Businesses normally will have prescribed “FIRE LANES” around their buildings. These should be maintained because during any emergency the Fire Department may need access to the roof and it is critical that apparatus have the space needed to set up to deploy aerial equipment to the roof.

- Businesses may have “Fire Hydrants” immediately adjacent to their buildings and again, keeping parked cars 15 feet away is imperative so that Fire Department hoses can be stretched to and connected to fire hydrants for water to fight fires. Ensuring the hydrants are clear of snow after storms also is imperative in the event there is an emergency at your business.
- Businesses should have a “Lock Box” on the exterior of their building that contains keys the Fire Department requires to gain access to the building after hours during an emergency. Applications for these boxes are available at the Fire Department.
- The Fire Department is available to conduct fire safety training; fire extinguisher training; and general evacuation drills for your business. Contact us at your convenience.

CONTRACTORS

- See the general comments at the beginning of this narrative for pertinent state regulations and references to NFPA 1 and NFPA 101.
- Plans for fire alarm signaling systems; sprinklers; fire standpipes, carbon dioxide, dry chemical, inergen and kitchen extinguishing systems need to be vetted through Development Services and the Fire Department for approval. A PERMIT from the Fire Department needs to be obtained before construction can commence.
- Following installation, all systems need to be 100% tested by the contractor. Once this is completed, the Fire Department must be contacted to schedule a “witnessed” test of the system. A successful test will result in Fire Department sign-off of the system.
- A sprinkler system also needs a written “affidavit” of an engineer who witnessed the original 100% test of the system by the contractor.
- Any fire protection contractor needs to contact the Somersworth Dispatch Center first (692-3131) before performing any work on an existing fire protection system.
- Oil burner installations require a PERMIT before work can commence and then a Fire Department inspection after completion of the installation.
- The state does not allow for open burning of construction materials.
- During construction if a fence is employed it is beneficial to consult with the Fire Department for emergency access after-hours.
- New homes, renovations to existing homes or any **RENTAL PROPERTY** requires the installation of code-conforming smoke detection **AND** carbon monoxide (CO) systems [CO IF FOSSIL FUELS ARE USED FOR HEATING OR COOKING OR IF THERE IS AN ATTACHED GARAGE]. These systems must be interconnected in the home.
Combination detectors that sense smoke and carbon monoxide simultaneously are available. EVERY sleeping room needs a smoke detector: one in the hallway on each floor: one on every level including the basement – all INTERCONNECTED to each other.
EVERY floor of the home needs a carbon monoxide (CO) detector if fossil fuels or a garage is present.
- Windows in homes in sleeping rooms must have a **MINIMUM** of 5.7 square feet of area and be NO MORE than 44 inches off the floor.
- Fire hydrants to be installed need to be vetted through the Somersworth Water Department.
- Generators to be installed must be situated beyond any openings into the home due to carbon monoxide considerations.
- Construction salamanders to be used during construction must be situated so as not to impinge upon combustible materials which can start a fire.
- Sufficient portable fire extinguishers should be deployed during construction especially if portable heating and any cutting operations are employed.

LANDLORDS/HOME OWNERS

- Any structure or single-family home where **RENTERS** reside must meet the following conditions imposed by the state:
- RSA 540:1-b requires that the City Clerk be notified of the landlord address and emergency contact telephone number of each property that is rented.
- Each bedroom needs two means of escape (doorways and/or windows).
- Windows in all bedrooms must have a MINIMUM of 5.7 square feet of area. The minimum width is 20 inches and the minimum height per sash is 24 inches. The window can be no more than 44 inches off the floor.
- Doors opening into corridors need a protected exit pathway – of a minimum of 30-minute fire-resistance rating. Doors need self-closing mechanisms on them.
- Exits must be clearly marked and illuminated.
- Corridors and exit stairways must be clear of any obstructions. This means trash, furniture, etc.
- Building electrical systems need to be maintained. Circuits tripping often need to be evaluated and the circuit breakers/fuses replaced or the circuits re-evaluated for replacement.
- Electrically-powered **AND** interconnected smoke detectors must be installed:
 - In ALL rooms used for sleeping
 - In hallways outside sleeping rooms
 - On every level of the home, including basements
- Carbon monoxide (CO) detectors also must be installed **IF** fossil fuels are used in the heating of the dwelling or if there is an attached garage.
- One CO detector must be installed on every level of the dwelling, including the basement.
- **Combination** smoke and CO detectors are available for use, but individual bedrooms do NOT need CO detectors – just one per level of the dwelling unit.
- Buildings with more than 6 apartment units need to have a fire alarm system installed that sounds in all apartments and has at least system heat detectors connected to the building fire alarm system (unless the building is sprinklered). Smoke detectors within individual dwelling units need sound **ONLY** in that unit. Otherwise, system smoke detectors need to be in all public spaces interconnected to the building fire alarm system (hallways, lobbies, stairwells basements).
 - CO detectors (if the building is heated by fossil fuels or there is an attached garage) must be present in individual apartments that sound only in the apartment. Also, there must be at least one CO detector in public spaces interconnected to the building fire alarm system. Combination smoke/CO detectors are allowed.
 - Fire alarm “pull stations” must be located by each exit door and on each level of the building.
- Buildings with more than 12 apartment units need to have the fire alarm systems monitored by a licensed alarm monitoring company.
- All fire protection systems need to be maintained and tested annually. It is a good practice for landlords to have new tenants sign a statement that all life safety devices were operational upon occupancy and that these devices should NOT be tampered with.
- Building heating systems need annual maintenance and this may include chimney inspections. Carbon monoxide cannot be allowed to be generated within buildings.
- Gas and charcoal grilles **cannot be used** above the first floor of a residence and on the first floor – not used within 10 feet of an overhang or combustibles.
- Some landlords do not allow smoking in the building. You will need to designate and post a “SMOKING AREA” outside the building.

- Some landlords provide ABC type portable fire extinguishers. If you do, they need to be inspected annually.

TENANTS/RESIDENTS

- Read the “*LANDLORD*” section to understand what requirements are placed on the landlords to provide for your safety. The remainder of this section details behaviors you need to practice to provide for your own safety.
- Smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors are installed for the safety of all occupants of the building. They NEVER should be tampered with or have batteries removed. If they sound often, several reasons could be in play:
 They are located too close to the kitchen and cooking particles set them off. Either be more careful cooking or ask that the detector be moved further away from the kitchen area.
 The smoke detectors could be located too close to the bathroom. Steam from a shower can set them off.
 The type of smoke detector could be an “ionization” type. These detectors respond to very small particles – the type produced by cooking and steam. If they are “ionization” type detectors, request the landlord install “photoelectric” type. These detectors respond quickly to the type of fires encountered in a residence – from plastics, wood and fabrics.
 Spiders come out to hunt in the evening hours and usually retire after 5am. A smoke detector is a nice warm place to reside so if you seem to be encountering evening hours to 5 am smoke detector activations and you do not know why – this could be the reason.
 CO detectors are installed to warn occupants of dangerous levels of carbon monoxide. CO is a by-product of inefficient combustion of fossil fuels (oil, kerosene, gas or wood). If this detector activates, call “9-1-1” immediately and evacuate the building. High levels of CO are lethal.
- Many fires in residences are caused by:
 Cigarettes
 Cooking
 Candles
 Electrical issues (about 10% of fires)
 Therefore – be careful when engaging in any activity that involves the above issues.
- Smoking materials causes more fires than any other source in residences. If you must smoke, use approved ashtrays and always fully extinguish your butts – preferably with water. Do not smoke in bed or in overstuffed chairs. Most fire deaths attributed to careless smoking involve chairs or beds. Even outside dispose of butts properly – in water or a can with water. And do NOT smoke if you are on medical oxygen.
- Cooking, especially with oils, can be dangerous. Stovetop fires can be extinguished easily by covering a flaming pot with its metal cover; using baking soda; or using an ABC type portable fire extinguisher. Do NOT fall asleep with food cooking in the kitchen!
- Candles should NOT be left lit when the apartment is unoccupied. Cats have been known to knock them over and fires have ensued. Candles always should be in a non-combustible containers.
- Overloading electrical circuits is dangerous. The use of “alligator” plugs to allow for more devices to be powered from one outlet often overloads circuits and caused fuses or circuit breakers to trip (if they do not trip – overheating of the circuit will occur and a fire may result).
- Extension cord fires often result when beds or furniture are placed on top of the cord without knowing it. Eventually the protective covering rubs off the cord and the copper wires inside are fused together – causing a fire.

- Exitways need to be kept clear of trash and storage. These include hallways and stairwells. In the event of an emergency where smoke is present and lights may fail or be obscured by smoke, tripping over obstructions in hallways, stairwells and exit doors cause many injuries and deaths. People become trapped and jam up in exitways due to obstructions. Keep exitways CLEAR.
- Accumulation of combustibles inside apartments: trash, boxes, broken furniture, clothing, junk, etc. The more things that can burn that are left inside an apartment means more fuel for any fire should one start. Keep your apartment as clean as possible by removing trash and unwanted materials.
- Gas/charcoal grille usage: NOT allowed above the first floor. And if it used on the ground floor – it must be 10 feet away from building overhang or combustibles.
- **FIREWORKS**: most fireworks in NH require a PERMIT from the Fire Department. Small firecrackers do not. Those that do require a PERMIT need the property owner's permission and the formal PERMIT process to be followed. Use of fireworks that require a PERMIT that are discharged without a PERMIT is a violation of law and is punishable. If you are using small fireworks that do not require a PERMIT, do so carefully. These still can cause eye, facial and hand injuries and can cause FIRES.
- The loss of power during storms can cause issues in the heat or cold. Do NOT utilize unvented gas or kerosene heaters inside buildings as they WILL cause carbon monoxide build-up and threaten sickness or death to the occupants.
- Holiday decorations are festive, but also are the cause of fires:
Electric lights may overload electrical circuits so be prepared to unplug devices if you must decorate with lights. If you decorate outside, be sure that the lights and cords are rated for "outdoor" use.
Once again, if you use candles – exercise great care and never leave them lit if you leave the apartment or home.
Live "Christmas trees" should have the bottoms re-cut before placing them in the stand so they will absorb water better. They need to have the water checked every day. A tree with no water eventually is as dangerous as gasoline in a fire!
Remove the tree to outside the building as soon as the holidays are over.
- If the building fire alarm sounds – evacuate. Call "9-1-1" to ensure the Fire Department is responding.
- Report building deficiencies quickly to the landlord and record the dates/times you reported the issues. If you do not get satisfaction, Development Services can be contacted. Problems with life safety devices also can be reported to the Fire Department. City officials will not get in the middle of landlord/tenant disputes over rent, etc., but we will take action if fire alarm systems/smoke detectors are inoperative or hallway/exitways are blocked.

FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEMS INSTALLATION PERMITS

- Somersworth requires a PERMIT be taken from the Fire Department for any installation of a fire protection system (fire alarm; sprinkler; kitchen extinguishing system; gasoline pump fire protection system; computer room fire protection system; standpipe; fire pump). There is a fee for this PERMIT which is available on-line at "somersworth.com" or at the fire station.

FIRE HYDRANTS

- We ask that homeowners or apartment owners/occupants keep fire hydrants clear of snow during storms. During a fire, locating a hydrant buried in snow greatly hampers firefighting efforts and can make the difference between controlling a fire or not.

OPEN BURNING

- New Hampshire allows “open burning” of garden preparation materials and brush at any time of the year – usually between 5pm and 9am, with a PERMIT from the Fire Department. You must be the property owner to secure a PERMIT unless you have written permission from the land owner. These types of fires must be at least 50 feet from structures and always attended.
- Camp or cooking fires no greater than 2 feet in diameter can be kindled any time of the day with a PERMIT as long as the state allows outside burning (during high fire danger the state will NOT ALLOW outside burning). This type of fire must be 25 feet from any structure and always attended.
- Open burning is allowed during steady rain or snow with a PERMIT.
- Treated wood and construction materials cannot be burned. Land clearing operations with burning must be permitted through the NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources – Division of Forests and Lands.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- The state of New Hampshire has an Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) that deals specifically with man-made and natural disasters and terrorism.
- This Office disseminates materials on staying safe in fires, earthquakes, floods, snowstorms, tornados, terrorism and other emergencies.
- You can contact ReadyNH.gov for information on a wide array of emergency situations - how to prepare for them and how to deal effectively with them once they occur.
- In Somersworth, the local Emergency Management Director (EMD) is the Fire Chief. He/she is the contact with the NH Office of HSEM. In the event of a disaster, the EMD coordinates with the state and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for resources including funds for rebuilding or reimbursement to the city or building owners.
- There is emergency contact information on the city’s website and Channel 22 on TV. You can sign up for emergency telephone alerts at Nixle.com/register and also at ReadyNH.com for a “Reverse 9-1-1” alerting system. We recommend that you do just this to be in constant contact with state and local officials should an emergency occur.
- Everyone should have an “emergency kit” in their home to be accessed if a “loss-of-power” situation occurs. Such a kit would include: a portable radio with batteries; flashlights with extra batteries; bottled water; a medical first aid kit; healthy snacks; and blankets for starters. More information is available at ReadyNH.gov.
- The city maintains three (3) documents relative to emergency management. These are the “Emergency Operations Plan”; the “Multi-hazard Mitigation Plan” and the “Continuity of Operations Plan”. These documents outline steps the city will take in the event a disaster occurs here and plans the city is taking to address conditions that can mitigate the effects of a disaster on city infrastructure.
- Remember that if you have an emergency generator to use during power outages; place it away from the house due to carbon monoxide emissions; disable normal power from the street into the main fuse panel by means of the main electrical disconnect switch; and not touch downed electrical wires in your yard or on the street.
- The city’s official shelter is the Idlehurst School on Stackpole Road. In the event of a disaster of any sort, the city can open this building as a shelter for displaced residents. Meals and a warm place to sleep usually are the services rendered in shelters.

- There is a procedure to open a “Warming Center” – a facility to use as a warm-up site and not an official “shelter” – in other words not a sleeping or meals-provided facility. It would be a site to get out of the cold (below 15 degrees) for homeless persons. Such a facility requires smoke and CO detection: proper exits: an “emergency plan”: and persons with “Crowd Manager” certification. Sprinklers are recommended but NOT required. An application for such a facility is available through Development Services in City Hall and requires a pre-inspection by the Fire Department and the Code Enforcement Department.