PORTAGE
A Natural Place to Move

Making the Grade: A Guide to Fire Inspections in the City of Portage

Department of Public Safety, Fire Division

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The City of Portage has adopted the International Fire Code (IFC). In an effort to prevent fires, members of the Portage Fire Department conduct annual inspections of retail, commercial, industrial and multi-family residential properties to insure compliance with code provisions.

Inspections during business hours are unannounced. While the inspection is being conducted, a representative of the business being inspected is invited and encouraged to accompany the inspectors. Many violations can be corrected immediately and others can be explained during this visit.

Hazards determined to be an imminent threat to life and health must be corrected immediately. Inspectors have the authority to close a business if this is not done. Other violations that are not immediate threats are required to be corrected within twenty days. Firefighters will make a return visit to insure any violations have been corrected. While it is the goal of the Fire Department to educate business operators on fire prevention and safety and achieve voluntary compliance with provisions of the International Fire Code, civil citations will be issued for repeated or uncorrected violations.

Preparing for Your Inspection

There are several things you can do to prepare for fire inspections, including practicing good housekeeping and making fire prevention a priority among employees. Many of the violations found in Portage fall into several main areas and can be prevented with some self-inspecting and follow up.

Blocked Exits

Items shall not be placed in front of fire exits or in aisles leading to exits. This includes chairs and tables, boxes and other items. Fire exits shall be unlocked while the location is occupied or shall be equipped with approved panic hardware.

Exit Signs

If exit signs are required in rooms or buildings, the block letters must be at least 6 inches high and be a color that contrasts with the background. Exit signs must be internally or externally illuminated for easy viewing. Power to one lamp will come from the main building power supply. The other light must get power from batteries or an on-site generator. Signs that use batteries must be checked regularly to insure that they are operational.

Emergency Lighting

Emergency lighting is required for all fire exits. Emergency lighting must work when the regular power is out. **Emergency lighting must be tested on a monthly and annual basis and documented.**

Ceiling Tiles

Ceiling tiles must be in place and openings cannot be present. If a fire were to start, missing tiles create draft conditions that cause the fire to spread more rapidly.

Heat Producing Appliance Clearances

All heat producing appliances, like heaters and cooking equipment, must have at least 36 inches of clearance around them. Any room designed specifically as a furnace room cannot be used for storage of combustible items.

Extension Cords

Extension cords cannot be used as a substitute for permanent wiring. If a change is made that requires permanent wiring, it must be installed. Extension cords can be used only for portable appliances and only if the cords are used correctly. The cords must be maintained and in good condition and be Underwriters Laboratory (UL) approved.

Extension cords cannot be a f fi x e d to walls, floors or ceilings and they cannot extend through walls, ceilings, and floors, under doors or floor coverings. Extension cords cannot be used where they can receive physical damage caused by the weather or from use. Extension cords must be plugged into an approved receptacle or multi-plug adapter. Questions about approved uses of extension cords can be answered by calling the Fire Prevention Office.

Multi-Plug Strips

Any use of multi-plug strips, such as computer surge protectors, must be Underwriters Laboratory (UL) approved and must be protected by an internal circuit breaker.

Cover Plates

All electrical switches, receptacles (plugs), and junction boxes must be covered so that wires are not exposed.

Clearances

A three-foot clearance must be provided around all electrical equipment including electrical panels (fuse boxes). An additional three foot clearance must be maintained around fire extinguishers.

Portable Fire Extinguishers

Portable fire extinguishers must be inspected and serviced once a year by a company that provides this service. Several companies are listed in the telephone directory that will provide this service, often on an annual contract. These companies can also insure that the extinguishers are mounted correctly and are ready for use.

Ceiling Clearances

Nothing may be stored within two feet of the ceiling in areas without fire sprinklers. If sprinklers are present, storage must be at least 18 inches below the sprinkler heads.

Equipment Rooms

Combustible material cannot be stored in boiler rooms, mechanical rooms or electrical equipment rooms. Ensure that heating equipment is checked regularly.

Knox Box

Knox boxes are required on all commercial structures in the City of Portage. If locks are changed, it is the occupants or building owners responsibility to contact the fire department to change keys in the Knox Box.

These are some of the violations of the International Fire Code that are typically found. This is not an all-encompassing list of provisions that must be followed but only a guide to assist you. There are specific situations for every business. The following link provides free online access to the 2012 version of the International Fire Code:

http://goo.gl/vkt8Rp

General Guidelines

A binder full of pertinent documentation should be maintained. This allows for easier access to fire protection system maintenance documentation and speeds the inspection process. Fire sprinkler systems, fire alarm systems, fire extinguishers, emergency lights, type 1 kitchen hood systems, and fire department radio amplifiers are things that require annual maintenance.

Check electrical appliances for proper operation. Pay particular attention to the condition of the cord.

Housekeeping is important. Keep work areas free from accumulation of combustible materials. Keep dumpsters and trash cans closed. Make sure dumpsters are away from building openings and not under building overhangs.

Fire doors must be maintained. Be sure doors with panic hardware are not secured with dead-bolts, chains or other locking devices.

Promptly fix holes in ceilings or walls to prevent spread if a fire does start.

For questions, please contact the Portage Fire Division, Fire Prevention Department

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02/15