



Additional School Safety Information

The Tennessee State Fire Marshal's Office is committed to ensuring the safety of students and teachers and works diligently throughout the year to make sure that schools are safe. Safe schools start with effective and comprehensive planning. Recently, the SFMO has provided information on the following issues, which are included below to provide additional assistance.

We encourage any school that is considering changes to its exits, classroom doors or removing fire alarm pull stations to contact the SFMO prior to performing any work. For questions about school safety, please contact the SFMO's Codes Enforcement Section at (615) 741-7190.

FIRE ALARMS

Fire alarms have long been an indispensable tool of fire safety; they provide early detection of potential fire and notification to evacuate. While a bad actor may use fire alarms to create confusion, disabling fire alarms, discontinuing fire drills or altering our response to fire alarms in buildings is not a safe solution.

Our office has received numerous questions regarding the removal or relocation of manual fire alarm boxes. It's important to note that the Code allows for the elimination of manual fire alarm boxes with certain provisions. They are:

Option 1: Schools without a fire sprinkler system

Manual fire alarm boxes may be eliminated where all of the following conditions apply:

- (1) Interior corridors are protected by smoke detectors using an alarm verification system as described in NFPA 72, National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code.
- (2) Auditoriums, cafeterias, and gymnasiums are protected by heat-detection devices or other approved detection devices.
- (3) Shops and laboratories involving dusts or vapors are protected by heat-detection devices or other approved detection devices.
- (4) Provision is made at a central point to manually activate the evacuation signal or to evacuate only affected areas.

Option 2: Schools with a fire sprinkler system

Manual fire alarm boxes shall not be required in schools where the building is equipped throughout with an approved automatic sprinkler system. The fire alarm or voice evacuation system must activate if a sprinkler head operates. Also, a means to manually activate the fire alarm must exist at a central point which is typically the front office.

EXIT SIGNS AND EMERGENCY LIGHTS

Exit and emergency lights must be in good working order at all times. You can assist your school in reporting any non-functioning exit signs or emergency lights, or those in disrepair, to the appropriate school official. Nothing should obstruct visibility of these signs.

DOORS AND ESCAPE ROUTES

Keep exit path widths open at least 48 inches. Exit doors must be easily recognized and shouldn't be hidden with paint or decorations. Fire-rated doors cannot be propped open, locked, or chained and must have latches. SFMO inspectors will enforce the provisions of the adopted codes based on their observations during an inspection. If a classroom door or means of egress is obstructed at the time of inspection, the inspector will require the obstruction to be removed immediately. Any alterations to classroom doors must comply with adopted codes.

FIRE AND SAFETY DRILLS

Fire drills provide an opportunity for teachers and students to practice evacuation to be better prepared during a real fire emergency. Drills should be scheduled by the school administration; however, drills should be held at both announced and unannounced times to simulate the unusual conditions that can occur during emergency situation. For unannounced fire drills, school administrators could make a "this is a drill" announcement moments before the drill to alleviate concerns regarding a false alarm or a bad actor. Please see Tenn. Code Ann. § 68-102-137 for requirements governing fire drills.

SPRINKLERS

Items should never hang from, or obscure, any fire sprinkler heads. Fire sprinklers should not show signs of corrosion or leakage; and if they do, it should be reported to the appropriate school authority.

FLAMMABLE ARTWORK AND TEACHING MATERIAL

Fire codes limit the amount of wall space that can be covered to 20 percent or 50 percent when the building has fire sprinklers. Fabrics or other flammable materials used as drapes also present fire risks. Such materials may be treated with a spray-on flame retardant. Remember, not all flame retardant applications last forever and must be reapplied periodically.

SOURCES OF ELECTRICITY

Extension cords should not be used as permanent wiring so schools should always consider available power sources when planning the classroom configuration. Be sure any power strip is UL-listed as an overload protector, and take care to always use appropriate wattage bulbs in any lamp.