



FACT SHEET for Fire Safety Inspections of Multifamily Rental Housing

There are approximately 80 multifamily rental housing (MRH) complexes in Sandy Springs. These are typically apartment complexes. They are home to thousands of people. In December 2016, the Sandy Springs City Council passed Ordinance No. 2016-12-37 to improve fire safety in MRH's. This was in response to fire department concerns arising from numerous MRH fires that resulted in serious injuries, extensive property damage and displacement of hundreds of residents. Fortunately no lives were lost in those fires. The new ordinance expands on existing requirements and adds several new ones. The goal is to help reduce life-threatening fires from occurring.

Each MRH complex is required to operate under a city business license. In order to obtain a business license, complexes must submit to an annual inspection of their property for health and safety code compliance. There are actually two inspections involved. One is performed by the City of Sandy Springs Code Enforcement division and the other by the Fire Marshal's Office (FMO). MRH's must successfully pass both of these inspections in order to be eligible for their annual business license.

This fact sheet is intended to answer questions and to provide guidance to property owners and managers of MRH properties. Many of the items are existing requirements but several new items have been added. This fact sheet will focus on the sixteen (16) fire safety items that will be checked for compliance. (There are sixteen other inspection items that fall under the scope of Code Enforcement for compliance and enforcement. They will perform a separate inspection for their items.)

Who is responsible for fire safety in MRH's? The overall responsibility for fire safety in MRH's is the property owner(s) and/or their property manager(s). It is their responsibility to arrange for, schedule, hire third-party service providers and obtain, maintain and provide documentation of correctness and/or completion of various fire safety items.

Who conducts the fire inspection? Fire Inspectors from the Sandy Springs Fire Rescue - Fire Marshal's Office will conduct the fire department annual inspection. They will inspect the common areas of the complex and will collect the documentation for other inspection tasks coordinated or performed by a Certified Building Inspector (CBI) and by the state licensed service providers.

Who qualifies as a certified building inspector (CBI)? The ordinance says this: "CBI means any person inspecting for compliance with the various adopted codes who is a licensed design professional (architect or engineer) or holds one of the following certifications from the International Code Council (ICC): property maintenance and housing inspector, building inspector, building plan examiner or commercial combination inspector."

How can I locate a CBI? Contact the City of Sandy Springs Code Enforcement Division at 770-730-5600. (A list of CBI's will be posted soon on the City's website.)

When will the annual fire inspection be conducted? The FMO plans to conduct MRH inspections in March and April of each year. It is highly recommended that the property manager and their CBI contact the FMO to schedule an inspection date and time so that they both may be present during the inspection.

Who performs the various inspection items? The property owner(s) and/or property manager(s) will need to obtain the services of a CBI to oversee, conduct and coordinate most of the inspection tasks. The CBI may, at their discretion, delegate work under their licensure to other competent persons. This may include property maintenance staff of the complex or management company that have been trained and are competent in performing specific tasks assigned by the CBI.

What are the inspection items (* if applicable) and who inspects / performs them?

- Controlled access gates (Knox products) – Fire Department
- Attic inspection (for firewall or draft stop integrity) – CBI or designee
- *Fire alarm system (not tenant unit smoke alarms) – State licensed alarm business**
- Smoke alarms *inside* individual tenant units – CBI or designee
- Fire department safety information – provided by Property Management
- Fire extinguishers (annual servicing) – State licensed fire extinguisher business**
 - F.E.'s in common areas – Fire Department
 - F.E.'s in occupant units – CBI or designee
- Complex, building and unit addressing – Fire Department
- Means of egress pathways (common areas) – Fire Department
- *Fire sprinkler system – State licensed fire sprinkler business**
- On-site “private” fire hydrants – Certified private fire hydrant contractor**

(** These businesses will provide both the CBI and the property manager with a written report with the results of their specific inspections. If any of their written reports indicate items not in compliance or in need of repair these items MUST be made compliant in order to pass the inspection. It is highly recommended to have these services inspect their items a couple months *before* the fire department inspection.)

NOTE: The fire sprinkler systems in any and all sprinkler equipped buildings MUST be “green tagged” to pass inspection. (Some complexes may only have a couple buildings with fire sprinklers. Those buildings had to be re-built with fire sprinkler systems after suffering a major fire). A past practice has been for some fire sprinkler businesses to “yellow tag” a system for certain minor impairments considered non-critical. This is NOT acceptable. A complex will not pass inspection if yellow tags are encountered. All fire sprinkler systems MUST have been inspected within the past year and have a green tag on the riser.

Who qualifies as a certified private fire hydrant contractor? A contractor is qualified to perform testing, inspection or maintenance of private fire hydrants who possesses a current State of Georgia issued plumbers license, utility contractor’s license or a fire protection sprinkler contractor license. Private fire hydrant contractors shall adhere to the provisions of current editions of NFPA 24 - “Standard for the Installation of Private Fire Service Mains and their Appurtenances” and American Water Works Association M-17 – “Installation, Field Testing and Maintenance of Fire Hydrants.”

What documentation is required? Property owners and managers must provide written documentation certifying that specific inspection tasks have been completed. The state licensed services (alarm system, fire sprinklers, fire extinguishers and fire hydrants) shall provide inspection reports. Their reports shall also include any field notes documenting any issues or problems and action taken to correct the

problem. If the CBI or state licensed services find problems, then those need to be corrected as soon as possible, preferably *before* scheduling the fire department annual inspection.

The CBI will prepare an inspection report and submit a “code compliance certificate” to the Code Enforcement Division along with a copy to the Fire Marshal’s Office. That report and copies of the state licensed services reports shall be provided to the fire inspector at the time of the annual inspection. This may be either by hard-copies “in person”, or, they may be submitted as .pdf attachments submitted by email to fireinspections@sandyspringsga.gov. Make sure the email contains the name of the complex, address, name of person submitting the documents and a contact phone number.

What about documenting attic fire barriers? The fire department also encourages the use of properly identified digital photos by the CBI to document the condition of attic firewalls / draft stops. The conditions to be noted are: present and functional, present but damaged, or none present. These conditions need to be noted to help baseline fire separation in MRH buildings with common attics.

How long does the fire department annual inspection take? That will depend on the size of the MRH property, number of buildings, layout, number of stories, amount of common area, etc. Inspections could take as little as a couple of hours to all day.

What areas and items will be inspected by the fire department? All common areas (fire lanes, common corridors or breezeways, leasing office, community rooms, recreation areas, complex storage areas, outside areas around buildings, etc.). The fire inspector will be inspecting the following: street address (for the complex) and sub-addresses (for buildings and units), Knox key switch for power operated gates, Knox boxes or padlocks, fire lane no parking signage and/or marking, fire lane widths and turnarounds, illegal parking, obstructed fire hydrants, illegal BBQ’s on decks or balconies and hazardous accumulations of combustibles. Any other fire hazards or unsafe conditions will also be noted.

What if the MRH buildings in a complex have an automatic fire sprinkler system? Complexes where the buildings have fire sprinkler protection throughout are exempt from these additional requirements:

- Do not have to install fire extinguishers *inside* all occupant units, however, fire extinguishers are still required in common areas including corridors and/or breezeways
- Do not have to install automatic fire suppression devices over cooking appliances
- Do not have to apply intumescent paint to any bare structural wood surfaces

What if the MRH buildings do not have an automatic fire sprinkler system? Complexes where buildings do not have automatic fire sprinkler protection must comply and implement these additional requirements by the stated dates:

- install fire extinguishers *inside* all occupant units by Nov. 15, 2017
- install automatic fire suppression devices over cooking appliances by Nov. 15, 2018
- apply intumescent paint to any bare structural wood surfaces by Nov. 15, 2023

NOTE: When automatic fire suppression devices are required to be installed (11-15-2018) or when intumescent paint is required (11-15-2023) the CBI shall be responsible for inspecting those items.

What are the benefits of intumescent paint? This special paint covers bare wood and acts as a barrier which delays wood from catching fire. This significantly slows a fire’s spread and allows time for firefighters to contain and control a fire to a small area. Though somewhat costly initially, the paint is far less expensive than retroactively installing an automatic fire sprinkler system. It does not require recurrent annual testing as do fire sprinkler systems and won’t freeze which can cause water damage.

What about the smoke alarms *inside* the tenant units? These devices are the responsibility of the CBI to inspect, test and service. The initial inspection (for the 1st time) shall include documentation (in a spread sheet format) of the unit number, number of alarms in the unit, whether they are hard-wired with battery backup or just battery powered, the brand, model number, manufacture date (found on the back of them), whether they are working or not and an affirmation that new batteries have been installed. Each smoke alarm shall then be re-tested to assure it is functioning properly.

If any of the smoke alarms are found to be more than ten (10) years old from their date of manufacture, it shall be replaced with a new smoke alarm with fresh batteries. This shall be noted in the documentation.

All smoke alarms shall have fresh alkaline batteries installed annually. The date of battery installation shall be written *on the battery* using a permanent marker pen, to be verified by the CBI or their designee. If long-life smoke alarms are installed using a ten-year life lithium battery, that needs to be noted and documented with photos. Such smoke alarms shall be exempt from annual battery replacement but will still require annual testing and documentation to ensure they are functioning properly.

What happens if there are violations or items of correction needed? Any items which are not in compliance or properly documented to be in compliance must be corrected within 30 days. A re-inspection will be scheduled by the FMO. All items must be completed and corrected to pass the inspection. Failure to comply may result in citations, court appearances, fines and suspension or loss of the complex's business license.

We recognize that in some cases there may be extenuating circumstances for items that may require additional time to order, install, repair or otherwise complete. If an owner or property manager feels they have such a situation they need to promptly submit a written request (via USPS or email) to the Fire Marshal Office (contact info below) stating the circumstances and reasons for requesting an extension.

NOTE: Any severe or life threatening hazards discovered will require immediate correction efforts.

Summary: As we start this improved fire safety inspection program we realize there will be questions. For assistance please contact the Fire Marshal's Office by calling the FMO Help Line at 770-206-4358 or by email at fireinspections@sandyspringsga.gov. A FMO team member will contact you to help answer your question(s) at their earliest opportunity.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation,

Doug Brown

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Division Chief / Fire Marshal

FMO Contact Info - Help Line: 770-206-4358 Email: fireinspections@sandyspringsga.gov

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