

Office of State Buildings Fire Watch Procedures

What is a Fire Watch?

A fire watch is a temporary measure intended to ensure continuous and systematic surveillance of a building, or portion of the building, by one or more qualified individuals for the purpose of identifying and controlling fire hazards, detecting early signs of fire, activating an alarm and notifying the local fire department in the event of a fire.

Chapter three of the Life Safety Code states that a fire watch is the delegation of one or more people with the following tasks:

- Preventing a fire from happening
- Dousing small fires
- Notifying both the local fire department and building occupants in the event of a fire emergency
- Protecting the public from fire dangers and other circumstances that puts lives at stake.

Fire systems can fail to operate due to interruption in the system's water supply, ruptured or frozen pipes, general equipment failure, or other issues found during a regular system inspection. This code also covers preplanned issues with the system that take effect when the system is purposely turned off for open flame operations like welding, or when the system is purposely disconnected to allow for testing and maintenance.

The NFPA 72 considers a system impairment as any "abnormal condition" that prevents the system or part of the system from functioning properly. Outages to the following equipment will initiate a required fire watch:

- Hose system and fire pumps
- Standpipe systems
- Sprinkler systems, including water spray, mist, and foam-water systems
- Water storage tanks and underground fire service mains
- Water supply
- Fire Notification Systems

Interestingly, NFPA standards do not specify how much of the fire protection system needs to be compromised in order for a fire watch to be instituted. However, a fire watch will be instituted any time the fire notification system/sprinkler system or part of the system is non-operational.

Fire Watch Requirements

The NFPA requires the implementation of a fire watch if the fire notification system is down for more than four (4) hours in a twenty-four (24) hour timeframe. Water-based fire protection systems need to be down for ten (10) hours or longer in a twenty-four (24) hour timeframe. In either situation, notification to the following entities shall take place.

- State Fire Marshal Office, PH: (225) 925-3650
- Local Fire Department
- Office of State Buildings (OSB), PH: (225) 219-4800
- Department of Public Safety (DPS), PH: (225) 342-5911

During occupied hours, personnel (preferably facility occupants/floor wardens) shall patrol all areas of the affected building for smoke, fire, or any other abnormal conditions at one (1) hour intervals. During un-occupied hours, OSB personnel shall patrol all areas of the affected building at one (1) hour intervals.

Fire watch personnel shall be provided with a means of identifying them as such. Each route covered by fire watch personnel shall be explicitly defined to ensure patrols are completed in the correct area/areas. Those involved with a fire watch need to be familiar with the facilities evacuation routes.

Fire watch personnel should specifically check, but not limited to, the following:

- Potential fire ignition sources, including frayed electrical wires and improperly stored flammables.
- Fire extinguishers must be in their proper locations, undamaged, unobstructed, visible, fully charged and operational, and bands that secure the pin shall be intact.
- Trash, garbage and excess combustible materials.
- Exits, stairwells and corridors must be clear of any obstructions that would impede emergency movement.
- Operation of illuminated exit signs should be inspected.
- Self-closing doors should be examined to ensure they are not blocked or wedged and may close freely.
- Sprinkler systems (if active) must be inspected for possible sprinkler head obstruction.

Fire watch must also inspect unoccupied areas such as crawl spaces, storage rooms, and mechanical/electrical rooms. Therefore, it is advised that anyone involved with a fire watch is highly familiar with the building and the equipment that they are keeping watch over. Likewise, they also must know where all manual fire alarm stations and fire protection equipment are located should they need to put out a fire.

Fire watch personnel shall complete a fire watch log sheet maintained at the facilities main security station or other approved location by the State Fire Marshal Office or local Fire Department. The fire watch log sheet can be found at <https://www.doa.la.gov/doa/osb/forms/>

In the event of a "FIRE", the person who is conducting the fire watch must abide by the following procedures.

- Activate the fire notification pull station
- Dial 911
- Make announcement over the facility public address (PA) system to evacuate the facility. If no such system is available, there shall be a sufficient number of fire watch personnel to initiate evacuation procedures throughout the facility in an orderly manner.
- Meet with and brief the local fire department in the designated location.
- Upon declaration of "ALL CLEAR" made by the local fire department, floor wardens shall allow facility occupants to re-enter the building.

Fire watches remain active until the fire alarm system is completely repaired and working properly and after any inspections and tests are completed verifying the system's correct operation.