



COLUMBUS COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES

Fire and Life Safety

FIRE PREVENTION DIVISION

Fire Inspections are an issue of life safety, accident prevention and fire prevention. When performing an inspection, fire officials are looking for the following:

1. General Precautions Against Fire
2. Emergency Preparedness
3. Fire Protection Requirements
4. Electrical Safety
5. Exit and Entrance Requirements
6. Flammable/Combustible Liquid Safety
7. Hazardous Materials Operations and Storage
8. Other specialized Operations and Storage

The North Carolina Fire Prevention Code was created to provide minimum fire and life safety standards for commercial businesses. North Carolina Law charges Fire Marshals with the task of enforcing these standards. The Fire Prevention Bureau strives to fairly and consistently enforce the Fire Code. This ensures that there is a level playing field for everyone.

North Carolina Law requires all businesses, churches, educational institutions and multi-family residences to have regular fire inspections. Firms with hazardous materials, institutions, and multi-family residences are inspected annually. Industries and educational facilities (except public & private schools) are every two years while businesses; storage facilities, mercantile and churches are inspected every three years.

There are charges for fire inspections. If there are violations of the fire code, an additional fee or fine may be assessed if the items are not corrected within a certain time period. For example, if an exit sign has a bulb that is burnt out, the inspector can give the facility 30 days to repair and/or correct any violations. A first re-inspection will be scheduled to make sure the repairs and violations have been corrected. If violations have not been corrected at this time, the inspector will perform a second re-inspection in 15 days. At this time, if violations have not

been corrected and the inspector has to return for a third inspection, a new inspection fee will be charged and a civil penalty will be assessed for any outstanding violations.

If the violation of the fire code is extreme, the fire inspector, during his/her first inspection, may issue a fine. An example of this is when a fire inspector finds a locked or blocked exit door at the time of the inspection. In this type situation, a \$500 fine can be assessed.

The Top Ten Code Violations Commonly Found During Fire Inspections Are:

1. Fire extinguishers in the businesses failing to have annual inspections, hood systems failing to have semi-annual inspections by a qualified extinguisher company.
2. Improper Storage of combustibles too close to heat sources or ceilings and the improper storage and use of flammable liquids/ hazardous materials
3. Extension cords used as substitute for permanent wiring and cords used in the path of travel (Cords can be damaged by walking on them).
4. Exit problems such as; blocked aisles, blocked/locked doors, and blocked open fire doors.
5. Inoperative Exit Signs and Emergency Lights due to burned out bulbs and bad batteries for back up in case of electrical power failure.
6. Bad housekeeping without regular trash removal.
7. Broken or defective electrical fixtures (broken, missing outlet or switch plate covers and electrical light fixtures).
8. Blocked Electrical Circuit Breaker Panels (A minimum clearance of 30" is required in front and to the sides of panels).
9. Fire Alarm, Fire Extinguishing and Sprinkler Systems failing to have routine servicing/testing by a qualified company.
10. Street address numbers not displayed or proper size (Columbus County Ordinances requires address numbers to be a minimum of 4").

If you need more information or have questions concerning a Fire Inspection, Contact the Fire Prevention Bureau at 910-640-6610 extension 226 ,227 or 229