



**Fort Bend County**

**Fire Marshal's Office**

## **Inspection of Foster Care Facilities Guidance**

### **Purpose**

Foster care providers (providers) are required by Chapter 749.2903 of the Texas Administrative Code Title 40, Social Services & Assistance, Part 19, Department of Family and Protective Services to have fire safety inspections. For those providers living in unincorporated areas of the State, that is outside of the city limits, the Fort Bend County has adopted the International Fire Code 2021 with local amendments. which will be the applicable standard in the absence of the adoption of a local fire code by the applicable authority. State Law permits cities, counties, and Emergency Service Districts (ESD) to adopt its own fire codes. In this case the adopted city, county or ESD fire code will be applicable. Cities in the state, for the most part, will use the "International Fire Code" as the standard for inspections. Based upon whether the cities, counties, and ESDs have adopted their own code, the entities will apply the respective fire code to foster care facilities within their particular jurisdiction. Foster care providers should be aware that local authorities having jurisdiction may vary in their respective interpretations.

### **SCOPE**

This guideline is intended to provide the minimum requirements necessary for review and approval of licensed care facilities located within the jurisdiction of Fort Bend County. Licensed Foster Homes with **more than 5 clients, the Foster Group Home will require a fire protection system.** Foster Group Homes fall into the definition of a Residential Board and Care Occupancy if the home houses more than three foster children not related to the providers. Fire protection system standards vary between existing and new foster group homes. Each property will be required to submit for a permit. **If more than 5 clients, then submission of floor plans on a USB drive shall be submitted to Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office.**

### **General Requirements**

Plans for fire safety and protection must be submitted for review, which is typically completed within 5 business days. All submitted plans must include accurate dimensions and detail the square footage of each bedroom. The floor plan should clearly indicate the placement of fire extinguishers, exit signs, emergency lighting, and carbon monoxide detectors.

Please note that plans for fire protection systems, including sprinklers, fire alarms, and kitchen hoods, must be submitted separately and directly to the Fire Marshal's Office. These fire protection system plans must be submitted before any work begins on these systems. It is important to ensure that submittals for fire protection systems are distinct and separate from the floor plan submissions.

To facilitate the review process for a group home, ensure that your plans include at least the minimum information specified below. These requirements are the basic criteria to initiate the review, but they may not encompass all necessary details. Depending on the specifics of your project, additional information beyond what is outlined in this guideline may be required.

- a) Address numbers shall be posted on the building and shall be visible from the street or road fronting the property. These numbers shall contrast with their background. Numbers shall be a minimum of 4 inches high with a minimum stroke width of 0.5 inch. (2021 IFC: 505.1).
- b) There shall be a minimum of two (2) exits from the building. (2012 IFC: 1007.1.1). Exits shall provide a clear width of not less than 32 inches. (2021 IFC: 1010.1.1).
- c) The means of egress, including the exit discharge, shall be illuminated at all times while the building space served by the means of egress is occupied. (2021 IFC: 1008.2). The emergency power system shall provide power for a duration of not less than 90 minutes. (2021 IFC: 1008.3).
- d) Exits and exit access doors shall be marked by an approved exit sign readily visible from any direction of egress travel. (2021 IFC: 1013.1). Exit signs shall be internally or externally illuminated. (2021 IFC: 1013.5). Exit signs shall be illuminated at all times. In case of power loss, continued illumination for a duration of 90 minutes is required. (2021 IFC: 1008.3).
- e) Corridors and hallways on floors serving clients shall be a minimum of 36 inches in width. No bed, chair, equipment, storage materials or any other item shall be placed in a manner that would block or obstruct the required width of any corridor, hallway, door or exit path. (2021 IFC: 1020.3, 1020.4).
- f) A fire extinguisher with a minimum classification of 2A:10BC shall be required for every 75 feet of travel distance. (2021 IFC: 906.3). Extinguishers shall be mounted in a conspicuous and unobstructed location. (2021 IFC: 906.5 and 906.6). Extinguishers shall be installed so that its top is not more than 5 feet above the floor, and its bottom is not less than 4 inches from the floor. A current service tag shall be attached to the fire extinguisher at all times.

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## Procedure

Read this section prior to conducting an inspection.

For the purpose of this evaluation only, an owner is defined as the adult resident(s) having primary responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the home, regardless of who owns the home or building.

Using the checklist as a guide, review the fire safety requirements and answer each item “yes” or “no” with a check mark in the appropriate box. Any “no” checked items must be corrected in order to meet the minimal evaluation standards.

Explanation of each item on the checklist:

1. If seven or more children (total children, not just foster children) reside in the foster home, the home is defined as a “Foster Group Home,” and a site inspection by a certified fire safety inspector is required. Additional or modified fire safety requirements may apply.
2. Children must be capable of self-evacuation and be without any primary medical needs. No more than two children younger than 18 months may reside at the home, and an emergency evacuation and relocation plan must specifically provide for the evacuation of all household members in less than three minutes.

3. Smoke detectors must receive power from the building electrical system or batteries. Check the smoke detector monthly for proper operation by pressing the test button or switch on the unit. Do not use a flame or smoke to test the unit. If a battery-powered smoke detector does not operate when tested, change the battery and retest. If the unit still does not work, replace the smoke detector. Any non-functional line-powered smoke detectors must be replaced. Batteries must be changed at least annually. Statistics show about one-third of the smoke detectors installed in homes are inoperative. When detectors are non-operational, the usual reason is dead or missing batteries. The detector(s) should be mounted according to manufacturer's instructions.

4. In addition to providing a smoke detector within each sleeping room, smoke detector(s) must be located in the hall or open area(s) in the vicinity of the sleeping rooms. The detector(s) should be mounted according to manufacturer's instructions. The smoke detectors must be tested in the same manner as described above.

5. In multi-story homes, the smoke detector that covers the upper floor(s), in addition to those required in sleeping rooms, should usually be located at the top of the stairs. The detector(s) should be mounted according to manufacturer's instructions. The smoke detectors must be tested in the same manner as described above.

6. Every sleeping room and every living and dining area must be provided with access to a secondary means of escape to the outside of the home in addition to the front or back doors. The purpose of the secondary means of escape is to provide an occupant with an alternate escape route when fire or other emergency blocks the primary exit from the foster home.

Three types of secondary means of escape are permitted:

(A) door that opens to the outside.

**or**

(B) The use of a readily operable window in the sleeping rooms and living areas of the home that provides an opening of not less than 5.7 sq. ft. in area, minimum of 20 inches wide and 24 inches high, and the bottom of the opening no higher than 44 inches above the floor, located within 20 ft. of outdoor space accessible to fire department apparatus.

**or**

(C) Every sleeping room and living area without a secondary means of escape (as described in A or B above), has a passage, other than the hallway, to another room that has a means of escape as described in A or B above. The passage must not have any doors that can be locked. An example would be two bedrooms or living areas directly connected with a passage or door. A shared bathroom connecting two sleeping rooms usually will not be acceptable because one or both of the doors could be locked, preventing passage from one room to the other.

**Note: There are two exceptions to the requirement for secondary means of escape from each bedroom or living area: (1) if the bedroom or living area has a door opening directly to the outside of the building, or (2) where the foster home is protected throughout by an approved automatic fire sprinkler system.**

7. No foster home may have any interior door used in a path of escape that can be locked.

8. Primary exit doors and secondary means of escape, such as windows, and security bars that require a key, opening tool or special knowledge (security code, combination) are prohibited. Several multiple-death fires have occurred when a door lock could not be released because the key could not be found. The prohibition on these types of locks applies only to those doors or windows that are part of the required primary and secondary exits.
9. The requirement for a child being able to open a closet door from the inside is to ensure that the child cannot accidentally become locked inside.
10. Children will often lock themselves in the bathroom. Provisions for unlocking the doors from the outside will facilitate rescue by other occupants or by fire department personnel.
11. An attic room, for example, accessible only by a trap door or folding ladder, would not have an approved primary means of escape. A standard set of stairs to access the room would be required. Spiral staircases are also inadequate.
12. Un-vented heaters that have the mark or label of an approved testing firm and are installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and applicable safety codes are acceptable. Some older, un-vented heaters are not equipped with vents to the outside of the home. These heaters depend on regular maintenance, proper adjustment, and an adequate air supply for proper combustion. Un-vented heaters can release lethal carbon monoxide into the home, deplete the oxygen levels in the home to dangerous limits, or provide an ignition source for a fire.
13. It is important to provide safeguards to protect children from the hot surfaces of heating equipment. Children do not always understand the dangers of hot surfaces. Screens (barriers) that prevent children from accessing heating equipment must be of closely spaced wire or expanded metal and must be securely attached to parts of the building to prevent movement.
14. All gas appliances must be equipped with metal tubing and connectors, no rubber hoses.
15. All gas-fired heaters, including any central heating unit, must be inspected annually by a qualified person to ensure the unit is in proper working order, to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.
16. There must be no storage of any item that could burn (boxes, paper, clothing, wood scraps, blankets/pillows) near stoves, heaters, fireplaces, or other sources of flame or heat, including the gas water heater closets or other gas fired appliances.
17. All matches and or lighters must be out of the reach of children. Children playing with matches and/or cigarette lighters cause many deaths and millions of dollars in damage each year.
18. Flammable liquids must be stored in safety cans with the lid shut to prevent vapors from escaping.
19. There must be a five-pound portable fire extinguisher mounted on a wall in the area of the kitchen to extinguish small fires that may develop in or on the stove and a fire extinguisher on every level of the home, and the fire extinguisher must be mounted on the wall with current inspection TAG signed by certified technician.
20. Home fire escape plans are essential to enable all residents to know what to do when the smoke alarm sounds, or other signs of fire are present. A fire escape plan shall be posted in the home. Home fire escape plans must be rehearsed by all occupants each month to remain effective. The plan must

enable all family members to escape using primary or secondary exits. A safe location outside the home must be selected as a gathering point, well away from the dangers of fire or responding emergency vehicles.

21. Extension cords are to be used on a temporary basis only. When the cords remain plugged in, they become part of the building wiring system. No frayed or spliced appliance cords are permitted because of the danger of a short circuit. All unused openings in the electrical circuit breaker box must be covered to prevent any material from coming in contact with live electrical wires.

22. Each foster home must have written plans and procedures for handling potential disasters and emergencies, such as fire, severe weather emergencies, and transportation emergencies. Each plan must include:

(1) Procedures for relocating children to a designated safe area or alternate shelter including specific procedures for evacuating children who are under 24 months of age, who have limited mobility, or who otherwise may need assistance in an emergency, such as children who have mental, visual, or hearing impairment, or a medical condition that requires assistance.

**Note: The above requirements set a minimum standard for fire safety in the home. Special situations and circumstances may call for increased fire safety requirements above those detailed above. You may request assistance from Child Care Licensing if you have questions. The Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office may be contacted to interpret fire safety requirements.**