



**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 2012 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 less than 4 clients do not require a fire sprinkler or a fire alarm 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. Less than 4 do not require a fee, but 4 or more will require the required permit for review and permitting process.

Explanation:

1. If less than 4, then a home if 4 to 7, then a foster home. If seven or more children reside in the Foster Home, the home is defined as a "Foster Group Home," and then an site inspection by a certified fire safety inspector is required. Additional or modified fire safety requirements may apply depending on each situation and building. If the answer to this question is "No," you may contact the County Fire Marshal's Office for assistance.
2. Children must be capable of self-evacuation, and be without any primary medical needs. No more than two infants (up to 24 months) may reside at the home and an emergency evacuation and relocation plan, as required by General Residential Operations rule §748.3231, must specifically provide for the evacuation of all residents in less than three minutes.

SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

Prior to beginning any construction, building modifications, or occupancy of the structure, site and architectural plans shall be submitted to Fort Bend County Fire Marshal Office. Submittals shall include two (2) hard-copy sets. Submittals shall be drawn to scale, be of adequate size, and be legible. Hand-drawn submissions are discouraged, but will be reviewed if deemed legible by the building and fire officials. Plans are typically reviewed within 10 business days. All dimensions must be included. A floor plan showing furniture layout shall be provided for each client bedroom. Aisle widths shall be indicated on the plan even though furniture does not need to be drawn to scale. Furniture shall be in place for the final fire inspection. Plans for fire protection systems (sprinkler, fire alarm, kitchen hood) shall be submitted separately and directly to the Fire Marshal's Office. Plans shall be submitted prior to any work being done on the systems. Fire protection systems require submittals SEPARATE from site and architectural submittals. Approval of architectural plans which include fire protection systems does not indicate approval of the included systems. Construction documents shall be prepared by a registered design professional.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Use this guideline to ensure that your plans have at least the minimum amount of information required to begin a review for a group home. These are minimum requirements and should not be viewed as all encompassing. It may be necessary to provide additional information beyond what is initially requested in this guideline, depending on the project.

- 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. (2012 IFC: 505.1).
- b) There shall be a minimum of two (2) exits from the building. (2012 IFC: 1007.1). Exits shall provide a clear width of not less than 32 inches. (2012 IFC: 1008.1.1).
- c) The means of egress, including the exit discharge, shall be illuminated at all times the building space served by the means of egress is occupied. (2012 IFC: 1006.1). The emergency power system shall provide power for a duration of not less than 90 minutes. (2012 IFC: 1006.3).
- d) Exits and exit access doors shall be marked by an approved exit sign readily visible from any direction of egress travel. (2012 IFC: 1011.1). Exit signs shall be internally or externally illuminated. (2012 IFC: 1011.3). Exit signs shall be illuminated at all times. In case of power loss, continued illumination for a duration of 90 minutes is required. (2012 IFC: 1011.6.3).
- 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. (2012 IFC: 1018.2).
- f) A fire extinguisher with a minimum classification of 2A:10BC shall be required for every 75 feet of travel distance. (2012 IFC: 906.3). Extinguishers shall be mounted in a conspicuous and unobstructed location. (2012 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. (2012 IFC: 906.9.1 and 906.9.3). A current service tag shall be attached to the fire extinguisher at all times.

Fire Sprinkler System Requirements

Existing Foster Group Homes do not require fire sprinklers and special construction if resident groups have prompt evacuation capabilities. Existing Foster Group Homes with clients with slow or impractical evacuation capabilities must meet specific construction requirements designed to delay the spread of smoke and fire and preserve the structural integrity of the building to provide an adequate level of

safety. A fire sprinkler system may satisfy many of these special construction requirements in slow evacuation capability facilities. Fire sprinkler systems must be installed in all existing residential board and care facilities with resident groups not capable of self-evacuation, regardless of the type of building construction. New Foster Group Homes must be equipped with fire sprinkler systems unless there are less than nine clients and all residents (clients, and providers and family) can evacuate the home as a group within three minutes. Providers in new Foster Group Homes, regardless to the number of clients, must install fire sprinklers any time group evacuation time exceeds three minutes. Any change in the evacuation capabilities of clients or providers requires a new evacuation capability assessment.

Fire Alarm Systems and Smoke Alarm Requirements

Existing Foster Group Homes must have an approved manual fire alarm system for four or more clients unless the home meets one of the following provisions:

- Where interconnected smoke alarms are powered by the building electrical system and not less than one manual fire alarm box per floor is arranged to sound all smoke alarms simultaneously.
- Other manually activated continuously sounding alarms acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction are permitted, in lieu of a fire alarm system.

New Foster Group Homes with four or more clients must have approved fire alarm systems installed, actuated by manual pull stations. In addition, approved single-station smoke alarms powered by the building electrical system shall be installed in all sleeping rooms and living areas and interconnected within the home so that if one smoke alarm activates, all will sound simultaneously. Smoke detection by fire alarm system devices installed in these areas will also meet this requirement.

Additional explanations:

Smoke detectors shall 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 shall be replaced. Batteries shall 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.

1. In addition to providing a smoke detector within each sleeping room, smoke detector(s) shall be located in the hall 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.
2. 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.

Every sleeping room and every living and dining area shall 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 that are permitted:

1. A door that opens to the outside.

OR

2. The use of an 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 grade accessible to fire department apparatus.

OR

3. 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 living area or 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.

No Foster Home may have any interior door used in a path of escape that can be locked.

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.

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.

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.

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.

All gas-fired heaters, including any central heating unit, should be inspected annually by a qualified.

There should 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.

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. Home fire escape plans must rehearsed by all occupants each month to remain effective. The plan should enable all family members to escape using primary or secondary exits. A safe location outside the home should be selected for a gathering point, well away from the dangers of the fire or responding emergency vehicles.

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 the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services if you have any questions. The Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office may be contacted to interpret fire safety requirements.