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Codes Review Newsletter August 2020



Codes Operations Update

The Codes Enforcement Section continues operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. All staff are working from home and all services are available, including plans reviews and inspections.

In addition, we continue to exceed our goals for customer service by averaging 10 days for first response to new plans submissions, and 68% of all submissions are reviewed within 10 days of submittal. Construction inspections may have to be performed remotely where positive cases of COVID-19 have occurred.

COVID-19 Update for Schools



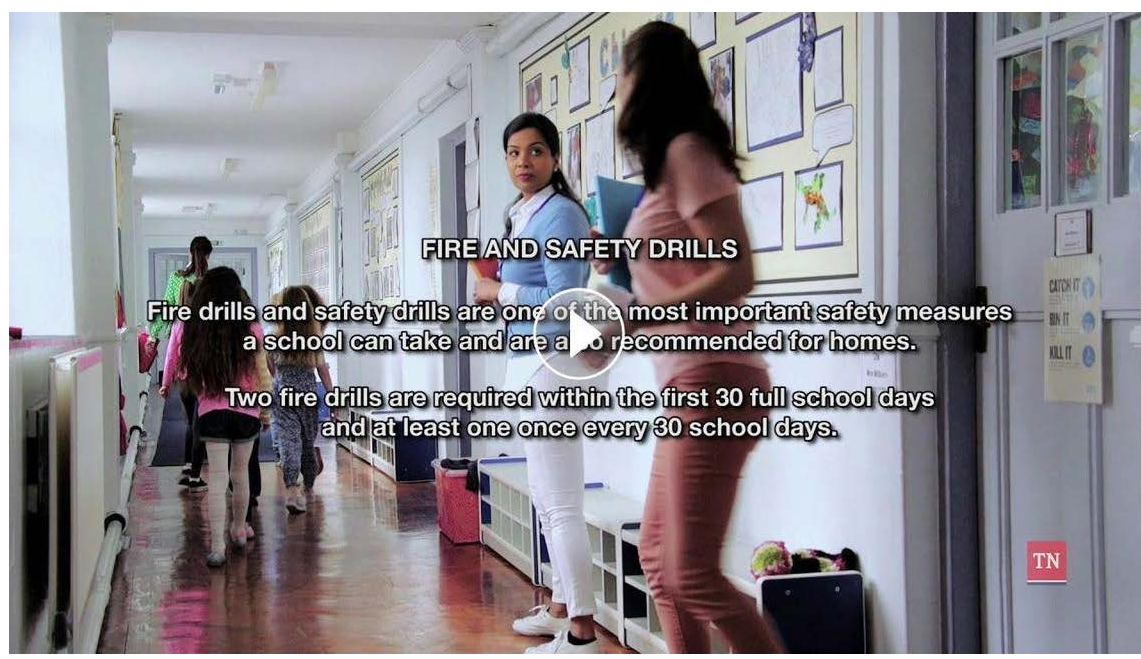
Our office adopts and enforces minimum fire and building safety codes for schools. We perform annual inspections for more than 1,500 schools each year. In an effort to assist schools during these unprecedented times, we are adjusting inspections to be less intrusive to school operations. We will not be performing inspections during the first 30 school days and will not ask to observe a fire drill. We will also minimize time spent in classrooms.

Many schools are installing sneeze guards or dividers to protect students and staff. This is acceptable by fire codes as long as they are made of hard plastic, not hung from the ceiling, don't obstruct the means of egress, or obstruct the water flow of fire sprinkler heads. Where flexible plastic is used, it must meet the requirements of NFPA 701.

[We've also developed this helpful guide to alcohol-based hand sanitizers and fire drills in schools.](#) The priority for fire drills this year will be social distancing over speed. If it is necessary to evacuate one class at a time, this is acceptable.

All SFMO inspectors will be using this guidance for the upcoming school year's inspections. Please note that if your schools are inspected by your local fire marshal, they may have more stringent requirements. As such, we would suggest coordinating with your local fire marshal in partnering jurisdictions when preparing for coronavirus risk reduction.

Here is an informative video to help schools prepare for school inspections:



Employee Spotlight: Meet Director Chris Bainbridge

Chris Bainbridge is the director of the Codes Enforcement Section of the State Fire Marshal's office. He manages the plan reviews and inspections of commercial buildings—those that are regulated by the International Building Code. He's held this position since 2009.

His goals for the section are to make buildings safer for Tennesseans while also providing a high level of customer service. He is also working to increase awareness of the state's regulations while making processes simpler and providing consistent regulation.



Codes Corner: Wedding Barns

by: Philip Cameron, Plans Examiner Manager

Barns have become a popular venue for weddings these days. They provide a rustic setting and ample space for a couple to make

their vows with friends and family. There are some misconceptions about the use of a barn as an assembly. It is important to understand regulations to avoid costly mistakes. A common misconception is that Tennessee's agritourism laws exempt barns from meeting code requirements. The agritourism law does not do this. It provides certain legal protections for agritourism activities.

A building or structure used for a wedding is an Assembly Occupancy whether it is in a barn or in a wedding chapel. The codes define Assembly Occupancies as a building or structure used for a gathering of fifty or more persons for civic, social, or religious functions, or for recreation and food or drink consumption. Fires in assembly occupancies have been among the deadliest in our country's history and are the basis for many of the code requirements today.

Here are some answers to common questions we receive:

Q: Can my contractor redesign my barn so that it meets code requirements for assembly use?

A: State law requires a registered engineer or architect to prepare plans for this type of occupancy regardless of the size of the facility.

Q: Do I need to submit plans to the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO)?

A: It depends on where it's located and the calculated occupant load. A link to [When Plans Submittal is Required](#) is available on the Codes Enforcement website.

Q: It was permitted by the local jurisdiction. Is my building compliant?

A: A permit issued by a local authority having jurisdiction does not relieve an owner of responsibility for approval requirements of the SFMO. Assembly buildings must comply with the more stringent requirements of the state and local codes.

Q: Does it require a fire sprinkler system?

A: Possibly. There are several factors used to determine if one is required. Your design professional will help you determine if you need one.

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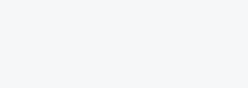
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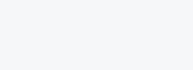


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