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## **FIRE WATCH REQUIREMENTS DURING SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS**

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**Disciplines:** Fire & Life Safety, Structural

**History:** Issued 12/20/17

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**PURPOSE:** This Interpretation of Regulations (IR) clarifies code requirements based on the California Building Code (CBC), California Fire Code (CFC) and California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 19 as related to non-operable fire protection/life safety systems requiring a fire watch.

**BACKGROUND:** 2016 CFC section 901.7 and CCR Title 19 section 1.14 require fire detection and alarm systems, fire hydrant systems, extinguishing systems, mechanical smoke exhaust systems, and smoke and heat vents to be maintained in an operative condition at all times. CFC section 901.7 directs that when a fire protection system is out of service, the fire department and fire code official be notified immediately and the school district shall establish a fire watch. For purposes of application, the Division of the State Architect (DSA) is the fire code official.

**SCOPE:** During the course of a construction project under the jurisdiction of DSA, DSA is the fire code official. The scope of this IR is confined to those situations where DSA has jurisdiction.

**GENERAL:** It is the intent of the CFC that fire protection/life safety systems in schools be maintained and fully operable at all times. In the event that a public school (grades K–12 or community colleges) within the jurisdiction of DSA has a fire protection/life safety system that is not operating in a dependable manner, that campus, or the affected portion of the campus, shall be provided a “fire watch.”

A fire watch is intended as a temporary alternate to a fire protection/life safety system and allows a building to be temporarily occupied while the fire protection system is out of service. The purpose of a fire watch is to protect human life and property and transmit an immediate alarm to the building occupants and fire department. 2016 CFC, Chapter 9, Section 901.7, directs that where utilized, fire watches shall be provided with at least one approved means for notifying the fire department. The sole duty of the fire watch shall be dedicated to performing constant patrols of the protected premises and keep watch for evidence of fires such as smoke or flames.

**1. REQUIRED FIRE WATCH:** When, as part of an alteration or modernization project or construction of a new building a fire protection/life safety system is placed out of service and affects any occupied portion of an existing building undergoing renovation or occupied buildings or portions of the campus, then the school district, DSA, and the Architect/Engineer in general responsible charge of the construction project shall be notified immediately by the project inspector. It will be the school district’s responsibility to establish, instruct and maintain fire watch personnel in/at the affected building(s).

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Where a fire alarm system is out of service, warning signs shall be posted at all entrances to any building to inform the occupants (see paragraph 1.3).

Modernizations of existing buildings or construction of new buildings that are not occupied by the public, staff or students during construction, shall not require a fire watch as long as the construction efforts do not affect other occupied areas of the building.

**1.1 Fire Watch Plan:** The school district shall develop a fire watch plan with the applicable building(s) identified on a site and building plan, and coordinate with the local fire department.

When requested, the school district shall provide a copy of the fire watch plan to the DSA Field Engineer for the region in which the construction is taking place.

A copy of the fire watch plan shall be made available to the local fire authority upon request.

**1.2 Requirements of a Fire Watch Plan:**

- Include a procedure for notifying the fire department and other contacts deemed necessary by the school district for notification.
- Indicate area(s) to be patrolled and locations of portable fire extinguishers, means of egress and areas of special hazards. If a kitchen hood extinguishing system is included in the non-operable alarm system, the kitchen shall be included in the patrol route during cooking activities.
- The method of sounding an alarm shall be described to initiate the evacuation of building(s). The manner of alarm shall be conveyed to staff and students.
- Determine at least one means of direct communication with the local fire department; a telephone/cell phone is acceptable provided that a test run of the designated routes verifies signal strength of the cell phone at all locations.

**1.3 Posting:** Signs shall state,

“WARNING, FIRE ALARM SYSTEM IS CURRENTLY INOPERABLE.

A FIRE WATCH IS BEING CONDUCTED.

FIRE WATCH PERSONNEL WILL NOTIFY YOU BY

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(State means of notification.)

IN THE EVENT THAT BUILDING EVACUATION IS REQUIRED.”

**1.4 Fire Watch Personnel:** The school district shall designate the fire watch personnel who are familiar with and are able to perform the duties as described in the fire watch plan.

The fire watch personnel shall not perform firefighting duties beyond the scope of an ordinary citizen. (Use of portable fire extinguishers is permitted, provided

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proper training in the use of fire extinguishers has been received and fire watch personnel feel confident in their ability to suppress a fire.)

**1.5 The Fire Watch Personnel Duties:** Duties shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Fire watch personnel are to be thoroughly familiar with facilities and areas they are patrolling. Route shall be a roving and continuous observation of the entire facility at least once each hour. Where hazardous operations (welding, use of open flame) are occurring, the frequency shall be every thirty minutes.
- Identify any fire, life or property hazards to appropriate contact per the fire watch plan.
- If a fire is discovered, the fire watch shall immediately:
  - Notify the fire department.
  - Notify occupants of the facility of the need to evacuate by a pre-described signal as outlined in 1.2 above. If the horns or public address function of the alarm system are still functional, use them to assist with evacuation of the building.
- Follow the provisions of the fire watch plan.
- Have knowledge of the location and use of fire protection equipment such as fire extinguishers.
- Be familiar with and manually activate fire door releases and/or stage roof vents or stage fire curtain as necessary when, in the judgment of the fire watch personnel, those portions of the building are affected.
- Update the fire watch log at the conclusion of each fire watch route.

**1.6 Fire Watch Log:** A fire watch log should be maintained at the facility and available to the local fire department and DSA field staff at all times during the fire watch. The school district shall determine the specific hours the fire watch will be on duty. At a minimum, the fire watch shall be on duty during all periods when the building(s) is/are occupied.

The log shall contain a directory of contact names, telephone numbers and other information necessary for making emergency calls.

The log shall indicate the following:

- Address of the facility.
- Name of the person conducting the fire watch.
- Times that the patrol has completed each tour of the facility.
- Record of communication(s) to the fire department.

**2. TERMINATION OF FIRE WATCH:** Where the fire watch is required due to a fire alarm system installation or modification, the completed or repaired fire alarm system shall be tested per National Fire Protection (NFPA) standard 72 and the system manufacturer's installation requirements. Testing and inspection of the system shall be

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documented utilizing the NFPA 72 Testing and Inspection Form. The project inspector shall submit to the school district, A/E in general responsible charge, the local fire authority and DSA, as applicable, copies of the NFPA 72 "Record of Completion."

- It is the school district's responsibility to cancel the fire watch once the fire protection system has been deemed operable as communicated by the project inspector.
- Once the fire watch has been cancelled, the project inspector shall:
  - Notify the local fire department.
  - Notify DSA field engineer.
  - Verify removal of signs.

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### REFERENCES:

California Code of Regulations Title 19, Section 1.14

California Code of Regulations Title 24

Part 1, California Administrative Code, Section 4-304

Part 9, California Fire Code, Section 901.7

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This IR is intended for use by DSA staff and by design professionals to promote statewide consistency for review and approval of plans and specifications as well as construction oversight of projects within the jurisdiction of DSA, which includes State of California public schools (K–12), community colleges and state-owned or state-leased essential services buildings. This IR indicates an acceptable method for achieving compliance with applicable codes and regulations, although other methods proposed by design professionals may be considered by DSA.

This IR is subject to revision at any time. Please check DSA's website for currently effective IRs. Only IRs listed on the webpage at [www.dgs.ca.gov/dsa/publications](http://www.dgs.ca.gov/dsa/publications) at the time of project application submittal to DSA are considered applicable.