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# LACONIA FIRE DEPARTMENT

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## INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS GUIDEBOOK

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Multi-Family Residential Dwellings  
2025

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The purpose of the guidebook is to provide the owners and prospective owners of multi-family dwellings information regarding their responsibilities in providing quality, affordable and safe residential housing in Laconia. The Guidebook uses best practices, relevant Codes and Standards, City Ordinances and State law to assist the building owner in complying with the law and in providing proper building maintenance.

Multi-family units range from 1-2 family homes to large apartment/condominium complexes and provide a wide array of building and safety issues that need to be addressed. Additional requirements, not listed here, may exist.

This Guidebook will review the following major points that must be addressed in order to maintain building safety:

- ⇒ Fire Safety Systems
- ⇒ RSA's Regarding Tampering w/ Fire Safety Systems
- ⇒ Means of Egress
- ⇒ Hazardous Conditions
- ⇒ General Building Safety
- ⇒ Hazard Area Protection

## **FIRE SAFETY SYSTEMS:**

Your building may contain a complete interior fire alarm system or may have standard smoke detectors. Full interior fire alarm systems are required in **new** buildings that are greater than 2 stories in height and/or with 6 or more living units. Fire alarm systems (where installed) must be tested annually by a qualified fire alarm technician with the report being forwarded to the Laconia Fire Department for review.

In **new** multi-family dwellings, smoke detectors are required to be hard-wired into the buildings electrical system, contain a battery back-up, and be interconnected within the individual dwelling unit. In **existing** multi-family dwellings, detectors are only required to be battery powered and not interconnected. In either case, all detectors must be properly maintained and functional.

Smoke detectors are required in all common areas, hallways, staircases, and inside each sleeping area of the home. Smoke detection is not required in bathrooms and within certain distances to cooking appliances. A carbon monoxide (CO) detector is also required on each level of the home as well as outside each sleeping area. The requirement for CO detection excludes attics, crawlspaces, and garages.

**Remember that all types of detectors are manufactured with a 10-year life expectancy. They must be replaced once they reach this age.**

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## **Fire Sprinkler Systems:**

Fire sprinkler systems are required in certain buildings or may be installed as an option by the property owner. Where sprinkler systems are installed, they must be properly maintained, monitored and tested annually to ensure their proper operations. A test report should be forwarded to the Laconia Fire Department. In most cases, spare sprinkler heads are required to be available in the event of a head activation.

It should be noted that the installation of sprinkler systems can significantly reduce the fire and smoke loss and the damage from the water release will usually cost less than 10 percent of the fire damage. The Code also allows for significant reductions in other areas where sprinklers are used. Most insurance companies also provide reduced premiums for sprinklered buildings.

## **RSA's REGARDING TAMPERING WITH FIRE SAFETY SYSTEMS:**

### **Tampering or Impairment of Fire Alarms:**

A person who knowingly tampers with, interferes with or impairs any public fire alarm apparatus, wire or associated equipment is guilty of a Class B felony. (RSA 644:3-c)

### **Criminal Mischief:**

By definition, criminal mischief is: a person is guilty of criminal mischief who, having no right to do so nor any reasonable basis for belief of having such a right, purposely or recklessly damages property of another. (RSA 634.2 I)

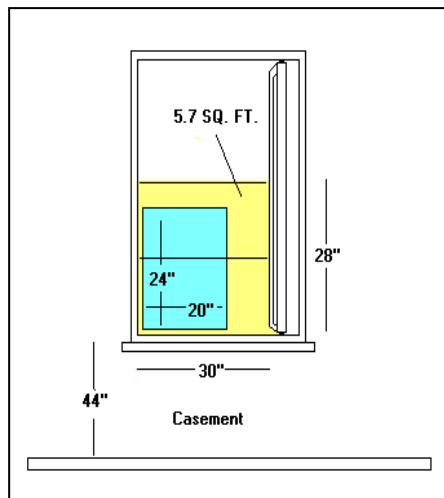
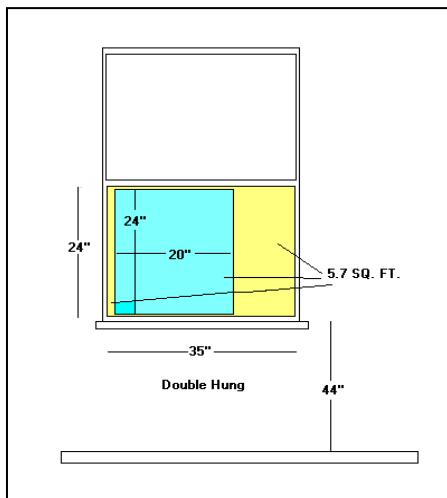
Any person who is found guilty of criminal mischief under this section because such person is a tenant, or a guest of a such tenant, in a rental dwelling who has destroyed, disconnected, or otherwise rendered inoperable any smoke detector in the rental dwelling, or who has attempted the same in a rental dwelling, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor. (RSA 634.2 IX)

## **MEANS OF EGRESS:**

### **Exits:**

Each apartment building unit must be provided with two (2) separate means of egress (exit). In certain cases, a single exit from a dwelling unit, meeting the provision of the Code may be compliant. Contact the Laconia Fire Department for additional information.

## Exits: (continued)



A secondary means of escape must also be provided from each sleeping room. This can be a door leading directly to the outside of the building, a door that provides access through another unlockable space leading to an exit, or be a window which meets certain requirements for size and access. As a general rule, windows used for egress must meet the following conditions:

- ⇒ Be a minimum of 20-inches wide
- ⇒ Be a minimum of 24-inches high
- ⇒ Be no higher than 44-Inches above the finished floor
- ⇒ Be accessible from the inside without the use of tools or excessive force
- ⇒ Have a clear open width of 5.7 square feet or meet the minimum waivable dimensions of 20" x 24" for existing windows
- ⇒ Some special conditions may exist and are reviewed individually

Window measurements are taken with the window open to its full extent. In the event that a casement window slides into the opening, the measurement is taken from the edge of the frame to the edge of the opened window section. Casement windows can be purchased with egress hardware to maximize the clear opening of the window.

Additionally, egress windows shall be no more than 20 feet above the exterior grade below the window sill. In the event they are over 20 feet, the window shall open to an exterior balcony or stairs leading to the ground or be accessible by fire department apparatus, including ground ladders which are normally available.

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## **Exits Pathways:**

Exit pathways (corridors) must provide a minimum 30-minute fire separation. Usually interior plaster lath or sheetrock walls in good condition will provide this separation. Damaged walls may need to be evaluated for compliance to this provision of the Code.

- Doors adjoining exit pathways must provide a minimum 20-minute fire separation.
- Doors leading into the exit pathway must be self-closing and latching.
- Doors or walls with transoms, louvers, or transfer grills are not permitted.

Common path of travel (the point leading to where two exit options are available) within apartment buildings should not exceed 35-feet. The travel distance from within a unit to the corridor door should not exceed 75-feet. Dead-end corridors shall not exceed 15-feet. These distances may be increased with the installation of fire sprinkler systems.

## **Exit Marking and Illumination:**

Exits must be clearly marked, accessible, and unobstructed. Exits must terminate at the exterior of the building and be provided with an outdoor path leading to a public way. Sufficient illumination must be provided at the floor or path level to assist in evacuation. Automatic, motion sensor type lighting, may be used in a means of egress as long as the system is equipped with a fail-safe mechanism. Corridor illumination must be set up where the failure of one lighting unit does not significantly reduce the available lighting.

Exits, other than main exterior exit doors that are obviously and clearly identifiable as exits, must be marked by exit signage. Where emergency lighting is required below, exit signage is also required to be illuminated.

In buildings greater than 3 stories in height and/or with 12 or more living units, emergency lighting and illuminated exit signage is required along all egress pathways, unless each unit has a door leading directly to the outside of the building at ground level.

## **Exit Stairways & Ladders:**

Internal exit stairways may be required to be separated from the building by a fire-rated separation depending on the number of floors/units served.

Any emergency exit ladders must terminate within 12" of the finished ground or on a roof surface not exceeding a certain pitch. Roof areas act as an area of refuge where evacuees can be safely rescued by Fire Department ladders.

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## **HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS:**

### **Separation from Hazards:**

Certain rooms within apartment buildings may require a fire-rated separation. These rooms include, but are not limited to:

- ⇒ Boiler rooms containing a heating plant for multiple units
- ⇒ Workshops and hazardous storage areas
- ⇒ Trash collection rooms

## **GENERAL BUILDING SAFETY:**

### **Portable Fire Extinguishers:**

Portable fire extinguishers are required in all apartment buildings. They are required to be placed as follows: each living unit, heater rooms serving more than 1 unit, laundry rooms, maintenance shops, and trash rooms.

### **Electrical Safety:**

Electrical panels must be clearly marked and be accessible at all times. Storage within 36" of the front of electrical panels is prohibited.

Extension cords may not be used in place of permanent wiring.

Ground-fault electrical outlets or panels are required within 6' of a water source and may be required in additional locations under the *National Electrical Code*.

Building lighting fixtures should have the light bulbs protected by a dome cover to prevent accidental electric shock.

Units should have sufficient permanent receptacles to provide safe power connections within the unit.

Junction boxes and panels must have proper covers.

### **Smoking Safety:**

Smoking materials must be properly disposed of. Ashtrays and non-combustible containers are encouraged. Care should be taken when emptying ashtrays or other hot ashes into refuse containers.

### **Railings:**

Handrails, railings, or guards must be present on stairs and decks that are greater than 3' above the finished ground.

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## **GENERAL BUILDING SAFETY: (continued)**

### **Heating Systems:**

Heating systems require a 3' clearance from combustible storage. This includes water heaters or other appliances that produce heat or have open flames.

Check the fuel storage tanks and tubing for leaks or damage. Contact the fire department in the event of a fuel or gas leak within the building.

Heating systems should be inspected and tagged on an annual basis to ensure proper performance.

Unvented, fuel-fired heaters are prohibited. Gas heaters are exempted.

Electric space heaters shall have a minimum of three feet of separation from combustibles. The use of extension cords with portable electric heaters is prohibited.

### **Gas or Charcoal Grills:**

Gas, charcoal, and electric grills are prohibited from balconies or within 10' of any combustible overhanging part of the building.

### **Emergency Instructions:**

Emergency instructions shall be provided annually to each dwelling unit to indicate the location of alarms, egress paths, and actions to be taken, both in response to a fire in the dwelling unit and in response to the sounding of the alarm system.

### **HAZARD AREA PROTECTION:**

A hazard area is defined as: boiler/fuel-fire heater rooms serving more than a single unit, laundry rooms greater than 100 square feet, maintenance shops, and trash collection rooms.

Hazard areas are required to be protected from the rest of the structure by one of two means: 1 hour fire-rated separation OR sprinklers. This doesn't mean that a full sprinkler system is required. Plumbers are permitted by code to install up to 6 sprinkler heads off of the existing domestic water supply system, therefore satisfying the hazard protection requirement. Hazard protection is required in all new and existing multi-family dwellings.

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## **CONCLUSION:**

Please use the guidebook to assist you in evaluating your property and in educating your residents to the importance of fire and life safety in their building.

Please don't hesitate to contact the Fire Prevention Division of the Laconia Fire Department for clarification on this or any other matter.

Thank you for your time and cooperation!

**Together, we can work to improve the safety of our community and those who call it home.**