



Fire Sprinkler Requirements

Handout No: 5
Revised 1/17/2020

An automatic fire sprinkler system shall be installed in all new buildings for which a building permit is required and in existing buildings upon a remodel or addition to a building except as indicated below.



Addition and Remodel Defined

ADDITION is the increase of area of an existing structure, for which a building permit has been issued, where the increase in floor area is not made exclusively for the provision of accessibility for the physically disabled.

REMODELED is work requiring a building permit including, but not limited to, cosmetic or structural repairs, renovations, restorations, alterations or additions to a structure, the total building permit valuation of which, as determined by the Building Official, exceeds \$100,000 for buildings containing residential uses or occupancies and \$150,000 for all other occupancies over any 36-month period.

Exceptions to the Requirement to Install an Automatic Fire Sprinkler System

The following are exceptions to the requirement to install automatic fire sprinkler systems in buildings:

1. Spaces or areas in telecommunications buildings used exclusively for telecommunications equipment, associated electrical power distribution equipment, batteries and standby engines, provided those spaces or areas are equipped throughout with an automatic fire alarm system and are separated from the remainder of the building by fire barriers consisting of not less than one-hour fire-resistance-rated walls and two-hour fire-resistance-rated floor/ceiling assemblies.
2. Detached structures used exclusively as a Group U Occupancy (i.e. small tool sheds, playhouses, garages, carports, barns, greenhouses, agricultural buildings).
3. Detached buildings accessory to Group R-3 occupancies that are not classified as a dwelling unit or a Group U Occupancy and do not exceed 1,000 square feet in gross floor area.
4. Shipping containers used as a Group S, Division 2 Occupancy (i.e. low-hazard storage).
5. Unless otherwise required by other sections of the code, a sprinkler system shall not be required for an addition when both a) and b) below are met:
 - a. The addition or alteration of the floor area to a building results in a total floor area for the building of less than 4,000 square feet; or less than ten percent (10%) of the existing floor area of the building; and
 - b. The cumulative total building permit valuation for all building permits issued for the subject building within any 36-month period, as determined by the Building Official, is equal to or less than \$100,000 for buildings containing residential uses or occupancies and equal to or less than \$150,000 for all other occupancies.

6. In an existing multiple-tenant building that requires a fire sprinkler system, the Fire Chief has the authority to modify the fire sprinkler requirements when the intended use does not create any increase in fire danger and the cost of installing a complete fire sprinkler system throughout the entire building creates an unreasonable financial hardship, as determined by the Fire Chief.
7. Pursuant to CA Govt. Code Section 65852.2(c) & (e) an automatic fire sprinkler system shall not be required for newly constructed Accessory Dwelling Units¹ (ADU's) when:
 - a) The primary dwelling on the property is not equipped with or will not be equipped with (as a result of remodeling or addition to the primary dwelling) an automatic fire sprinkler system; or
 - b) The Accessory Dwelling Unit is detached from other buildings and has a floor area of 850 sq. ft. square feet or less (*pursuant to SMC 19.50.090.2.b. dwelling units exceeding 850 sq. ft. are not ADU's*); or
 - c) The attached Accessory Dwelling Unit is constructed within or added to an existing primary residence where the existing primary dwelling on the property is not equipped with an automatic fire sprinkler system and the addition or alteration of the existing primary dwelling to facilitate the attached Accessory Dwelling Unit does not trigger the local code amendment (SMC 14.10.045 - 2019 California Fire Code amendment of section 903.2) requiring automatic fire sprinklers (See item 5 above).

For questions pertaining to the requirements for fire sprinkler systems, call the Sonoma Fire Department at (707) 996-2102.

Please be advised that when Chlorinated Polyvinyl Chloride (CPVC) water piping and fittings (including piping for residential fire sprinkler systems) are used within residential buildings special worker safety measures, flushing and certification requirements must be met pursuant to Section 604.1 of the California Plumbing Code (CPC).

To help prevent plan review delays, applications for projects which require fire sprinkler system installation should be accompanied by three (3) sets of construction plans, design calculations and sprinkler head data. Additionally, the plans should clearly indicate that a fire sprinkler system is required for the proposed project. If plans for the fire sprinkler system are not submitted with the original permit application, a separate permit must be obtained for the fire sprinkler system.

¹ Pursuant to CA Govt. Code Section 65852.2(j)(4) "Accessory dwelling unit" means an attached or a detached residential dwelling unit which provides complete independent living facilities for one or more persons. It shall include permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation on the same parcel as the single-family dwelling is situated. An accessory dwelling unit also includes the following: