

Fire System Impairment Quick Guide

For Property Managers, Building Engineers, and Construction Supervisors

When Is Fire Watch Required?

Fire protection systems are designed to protect occupants and property. When these systems are impaired or out of service, most fire codes require a Fire Watch until repairs are completed.

This guide summarizes the most common situations where Fire Watch may be required.

1. Fire Alarm System Impairment

Examples

- Fire alarm panel malfunction
- Alarm system offline during maintenance
- Power failure affecting alarm system
- Communication failure with monitoring service
- Major renovations affecting alarm devices

Why Fire Watch Is Required

Without an operational alarm system, occupants may not be alerted to fire conditions.

Applicable Codes

- International Fire Code (IFC)
- NFPA 72 – National Fire Alarm Code



2. Fire Sprinkler System Impairment

Examples

- Sprinkler system shut down for repair
- Broken sprinkler pipes
- Water supply interruption
- Control valves closed or malfunctioning
- Fire pump failure

Why Fire Watch Is Required

Sprinkler systems provide automatic fire suppression. If disabled, fire can spread rapidly.

Applicable Codes

- IFC Section 901 / 903
- NFPA 25 – Inspection, Testing, and Maintenance of Water-Based Systems



3. Construction

Examples

- Alarm or sprinkler systems temporarily disabled during construction
- Structural modifications affecting fire protection
- Dust, welding, or demolition affecting system reliability

Why Fire Watch Is Required

Construction environments increase fire risk while temporarily reducing fire protection.

4. Vacant or Partially Occupied Buildings

Examples

- Buildings awaiting renovation
- Recently vacated commercial properties
- Structures awaiting sale or demolition

Why Fire Watch Is Required

Vacant structures have increased risks including unauthorized entry and delayed fire detection.

5. High-Risk Occupancies

Examples

- High-rise buildings
- Hospitals or assisted living facilities
- Hotels and large residential complexes
- Industrial facilities

Why Fire Watch Is Required

If fire protection systems are impaired, a fire watch may be required to maintain life safety.



What Does a Fire Watch Do?

A trained Fire Watch professional will:

- ✓ Continuously patrol the building(s) or assigned area
- ✓ Identify smoke, fire hazards, or unsafe conditions
- ✓ Ensure emergency exits remain clear
- ✓ Maintain detailed incident logs
- ✓ Immediately contact emergency services if a sign of fire is discovered

Fire Watch continues **until the fire protection system is restored and approved by authorities.**

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