



Midlothian Fire Department – Fire Prevention Bureau

Stephen Hotwagner

Fire Chief

Michael Lonkar

Fire Prevention Officer

Fire Prevention / Inspection Information

Hello, members of Midlothian's Chamber of Commerce! Thank you for having me! My name is Michael Lonkar. I am the current Fire Prevention Officer for the Midlothian FD. I grew up in Midlothian, so the safety and success of this community is very important to me. I have been in the fire service for about 17 years. I have been the part-time FPO with Midlothian for 3 years.

Why we conduct annual Fire safety inspections?

- Most business owners do not have the specialized knowledge necessary to conduct a fire and life safety inspection of their business. Nor do they realize the devastating effects that a fire or hazardous materials incident can have on their business. Business failure rates after a significant fire can be as high as 70 or 80 percent. Our best bet is to prevent a fire before it happens. Reasons for an annual inspection program are identification on hazards and preplanning to ensure the safety of first responders, improve safety of the public and occupants, and ensure proper operation of fire alarm and suppression systems.

Where do we conduct annual inspections?

- The Village also requires an inspection for any new business prior to opening to the public or operating out of the building the business is located.
- These include places of public assembly, storage buildings, industrial uses, etc. The purpose of these inspections is to assure code compliance and an acceptable level of safety for the building occupants, as well as to protect adjacent properties that may be affected by an incident on your property.

When do I schedule a new business / final for inspection?

- Although we may be able to accommodate you with an earlier fire alarm test, sprinkler test or a general walk through and provide suggestions; a final inspection will **ALWAYS** be required.
- A final fire inspection must be made when:



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- The permitted work is completed
- The building department has approved all of their inspections
- The health department has finished their inspections (if required)
- Before being furnished, stocked, or occupied. (Exception: At the discretion of the Fire Chief or FPO, approval for furnishing can be granted if all fire protection systems are in service, and are monitored (if required)
- And other items as deemed appropriate have been completed, (i.e. exit and emergency lighting, fire alarm systems, no open electrical, etc.) Tests and inspections for all required fire protection and alarm systems, exit and emergency lighting must be conducted before occupancy. A final inspection MUST be approved before occupancy

A few things we look for on our annual inspections

Checklist Item #1: Clear Paths of Egress

- The fire inspector will look closely at the paths of egress at your premises, and whether these are blocked or obstructed in any way. Having multiple exits in the event of a fire will increase the likelihood that everyone is able to get out safely, and it is required by fire code. Yet, if your staff or customers can't reach these exits or open them once they do, they are of little value.

The fire inspector will check to see that you have:

1. A path which is at least 36 inches wide that leads to every exit door.
2. Exit doors which can be opened easily and which are unlocked.
3. If your facility has fire doors, that these can close without obstruction and are not propped open with anything that could prevent them from closing and are in compliance with NFPA 101 & 101B

Checklist Item #2: Emergency Exit Lights

- Not only are all paths of egress required to be unobstructed, they must be clearly marked as well. In the event of a fire, your facility may lose power or visibility may be severely reduced due to heavy smoke. For these reasons, **all exit signs should have backup batteries**, so they will still be clearly illuminated for a minimum of 90 minutes in the event of a fire or power outage. Many of these units have emergency lights on top as well, to further increase the available light and make exits even more visible. The fire



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inspector will test to see that all of these bulbs are working and that they have functioning batteries. Must comply with NFPA 101.

Checklist Item #3: Fire Extinguishers

- Designed to give any staff at your business the means to put out a small fire on their own, fire extinguishers can be a godsend. They may allow you to stop a small fire before it grows larger, avoiding widespread damage to your business and injuries to your staff or customers. For these reasons, the fire inspector will pay special attention to these units, to verify that they are in compliance with NFPA 10.
- **They will check to see that:**
 1. The minimum required numbers of extinguishers are present – having a fire extinguisher within 75 feet of travel distance from any place in your facility is required in typical office settings. *These requirements may change depending on the environment.
 2. The extinguishers are the correct type to combat the fire hazards which are present at your business.
 3. These are the required size; Extinguishers must be at least a 2A-10BC size rating. A reputable extinguisher company will advise you on what extinguisher is necessary for your business.
 4. Your extinguishers have been serviced within the past 12 months, all **required inspections have taken place** and the service tag is in place and updated.
 5. All extinguishers are mounted on the wall securely or in an approved cabinet.
 6. These units are not obstructed in any way.
 7. The top of any extinguisher which is 40 pounds or lighter is not higher than 5 feet from the floor. For extinguishers heavier than 40 pounds, the top of the unit should be no higher than 3.5 feet from the floor. All extinguishers must have at least 4 inches of space from the bottom of the unit to the ground.

Checklist Item #4: Fire Alarm Panels

- The panel is responsible for controlling the system of fire alarms present at your facility. The fire inspector will inspect the fire alarm panel, to ensure that the annually required **fire alarm maintenance and inspection** by qualified personnel has taken place and is documented. To ensure that you don't receive a citation, be sure that your inspection tags are up to date and that no warning lights are illuminated on your panel.



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A warning light will result in an automatic citation, so it is best to simply fix the problem in advance of the fire inspector's visit if one is currently present and NFPA 72 compliant.

Checklist Item #5: Fire Sprinklers

- If your facility has a fire sprinkler system in place, this will be carefully inspected by the fire inspector. When preparing for an inspection, know that the fire inspector will check to see if there is **adequate clearance around each sprinkler deflector**. This ensures that the water will be able to disperse without obstruction, and it is required by fire code. A common code violation is storing boxes or other items too high or having large furniture or shelving units placed in close proximity to the sprinkler head. According to NFPA 25, in most cases there must be at least 18 inches of clearance around each sprinkler deflector to comply with regulations. In addition, the fire inspector will check that **the required annual inspection of your fire sprinklers** has been carried out by qualified personnel and documented and in compliance with the applicable NFPA standard (13,13D,13R,13E,14,15,16)

Checklist Item #6: Fire Sprinkler System Water Supply

- For this system to function correctly, not only must the sprinkler deflectors have the proper clearance, the water must flow as it should when called upon to extinguish a fire. The fire inspector will examine the critical components of the sprinkler system water supply, to determine that they are in good working order. These include the valves, hose connections and fire department connections. The fire inspector will also look for **signs of leakage, physical damage, corrosion** or obstruction by foreign materials or paint.

Checklist Item # 8: Kitchen Hood Fan and suppression system

- In any commercial kitchen, fire is no small risk or hazard. The kitchen is a high-heat environment, and it's designed to be well-insulated, to keep in the heat required for cooking. Over time, in any sized commercial kitchen, grease and grime begin to build up, which presents problems for the kitchen hood fire suppression system. Grease will cling to the nozzles that disperse your fire suppression agent, disabling the system's ability to suppress and extinguish kitchen fires. This is a serious fire hazard, and a key reason that



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you must regularly maintain your kitchen fire suppression system. Per NFPA 17 and manufacturer requirements, the kitchen hood suppression system is required to be inspected every 6-months.

Checklist Item #7: Proper Storage of Combustible Liquids

- Combustible materials and liquids represent a special fire hazard and must be treated accordingly. These will provide fuel to any fire and they pose a significant risk to your facility, including explosion potential, so proper measures must be taken at all times. They should be stored in a fireproof cabinet, to minimize the risk of a conflagration and the accompanying property damage or personal injury it can cause. Must comply with

Checklist Item #8: Maximum Occupancy Limits

- Your building has a maximum occupancy limit which has been put in place for a reason. If a fire were to occur, this is the number of people who could safely evacuate the premises in a timely fashion. Therefore, exceeding the maximum allowable occupancy poses a serious risk, and you will receive a citation if you break this threshold. Different types of structures used for different purposes (business, healthcare, assembly, education, etc) have specific occupancy requirements which you must meet to pass your inspection. Refer to **NFPA 101 6.1** for more information.

Checklist Item #9: Overloading Electrical Sockets & Using Extension Cords Correctly

- Overloading any electrical sockets is a clear fire code violation. You may not plug too many items into a single socket, by using multiple power strips in the same location or improper multi-plug adapters. Plugging two or more extension cords together to extend the reach of the power in your facility will also be cited during a fire inspector's inspection. It is prohibited to use extension cords in lieu of permanent wiring. NFPA 70

Checklist Item #10: Electrical Panels



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- Since getting to the electrical panels in your building may be required for regular maintenance or any upgrades, or to run additional wiring through the building, they must be unobstructed and accessible at all times. Also, since electrical panels have live current running through them, any potentially flammable items (like cardboard boxes stored too close to the panel) must be far enough away to avoid fire risk. In most cases you're required to leave 3 feet of clearance in front of the panel, to provide sufficient working space and to lessen fire risk.

I hope this helps you understand more of how we conduct inspections, why we conduct them and what we are looking for during our annual business inspections. We want to reiterate that we're here to work with our local businesses both for their success and the success of our village! Midlothian is "A community that pride built" and together we can keep it safe. Please feel free to contact me via e-mail with any questions. Thank you and God bless!

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