



GWINNETT COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES



GWINNETT COUNTY FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES

FIRE SAFETY HANDBOOK

For Apartment Managers



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Fire and Emergency Services
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Fire Safety

Handbook for Apartment Managers

Introduction

Fire in an apartment building often involves more than one unit. Many building occupants may be affected. The dense nature of apartment living allows for the spread of smoke, heat, and fire.

Fire is always unexpected. Preparing for it shouldn't be. Responding to a fire requires quick decisions and fast actions in a setting that can be loud, smoky, dark, and hot. Lives and property can be saved by being prepared before fire strikes. The rules and regulations of the Safety Fire Commissioner, Chapter 120-3-3 Rules and Regulations for the state minimum Fire Safety Standards and the Gwinnett County Ordinance adopt fire safety regulations for multi-residential housing. These rules require property owners to develop a Fire Emergency Guide for Tenants. They also require that tenants be informed about the fire protection equipment in the building.

This publication was developed to assist property managers in their fire safety efforts. This handbook will provide:

1. Information to staff and tenants about home fire prevention and safety.
2. Guidelines for developing a Code-required Fire Emergency Guide,
3. Recommendations for developing fire emergency procedures
4. An overview of what to expect from the Fire Department inspection process.



CHAPTER 1

Common Home Fire Hazards

In a typical year, the Gwinnett County Fire Department responds to around 200 fires in multi-residential buildings and 235 in 2009. Understanding where and how residential fires begin and following a few basic rules will help reduce the risk. The following information is intended to inform building managers and owners about the potential fire hazards common to apartment buildings. This information should be shared with tenants on a regular basis.

Cooking Safety for Residents

In the United States, cooking is the leading cause of home fires. In most communities, cooking causes more fires than any other source. Over a third of all fires in multi-residential buildings started in the kitchen. The majority of these fires began from food left unattended on the stove. The most common materials ignited are grease, oils, and flammable items such as plastic bags and paper products left on or near the stove.

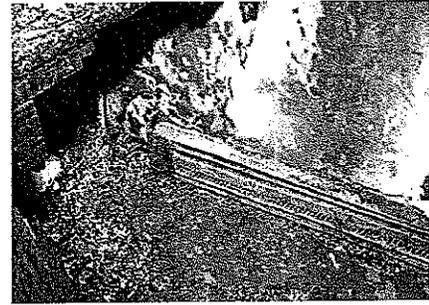


Safety Precautions for Residents

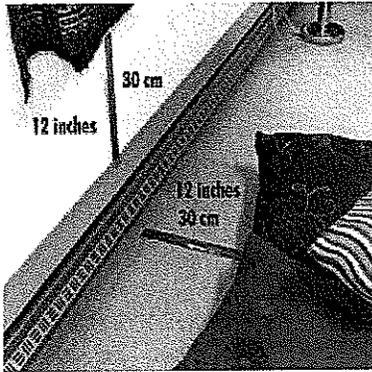
- Do not leave cooking unattended on the stove. A serious fire can start in seconds.
- Keep the stove and oven clean. Do not allow grease to build up.
- If a fire starts in a pan, turn off the stove and carefully cover the pan with a lid or another pan. Do *not* throw water on the fire!
- Keep children and pets away from the stove while cooking.
- Keep items that can catch fire--such as dishtowels, paper or plastic bags--at least three feet away from the stove top.
- Keep loose-fitting clothing away from hot burners.
- Never use the stove or oven to heat your home. Use all cooking equipment according to manufacturer's directions. Don't alter stovetops, burners or backsplashes.

Heating Safety for Residents

Heaters are the second leading cause of fires in residential buildings and one of the leading causes of fire deaths in Georgia. As would be expected, most heating-related fires occur during the winter months when heaters get turned on and the use of portable heaters and fireplaces increases. Fires caused by furniture, bedding, and other materials placed too close to baseboard heaters and portable heaters are the most common types of heating-related residential fires.



Safety Precautions for Residents



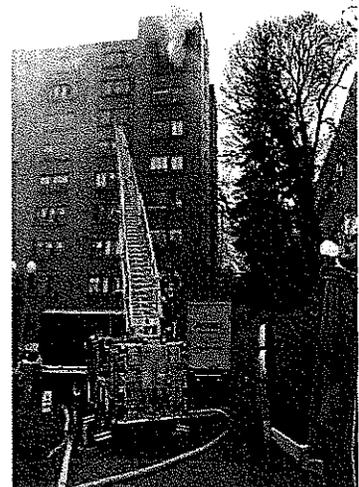
- Give your heaters space. Do not put anything close to any type of heater.
- Never use an extension cord with a portable heater.
- Make sure your portable heater is tested by an independent testing laboratory U.L. (Underwriters Laboratory) and has an automatic shut off feature if it tips over.
- Turn portable heaters off before leaving the room or before going to bed.
- Never permit any item to drape across heaters.
- Clean or replace furnace filters regularly.
- Inspect all heating equipment yearly and always hire an experienced electrician to do any necessary repair work on your baseboard heaters.

Smoking Safety for Residents

Fires started by smoking materials cause more fatalities than any other type of fire. A report of home fires between 2001 and 2004 showed that smoking was the cause of 45% of all fatal apartment fires (USFA 2006).

Safety Precautions for Residents

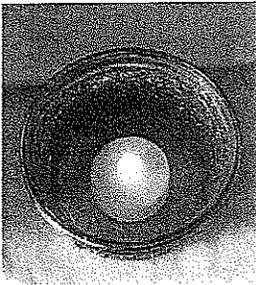
- Never smoke in bed or when feeling drowsy
- Keep ashtrays off of sofas or chairs
- Use deep ashtrays and soak ashes in water before disposal.
- Don't leave cigarettes, cigars or pipes unattended. Put out all smoking materials before you walk away.
- Do not leave matches or lighters where children can reach them.



Candle Safety for Residents

The most common mistake people make when using candles is placing them near combustible materials (such as drapes, clothing, or bedding). Most candle fires occur during the months of December and January.

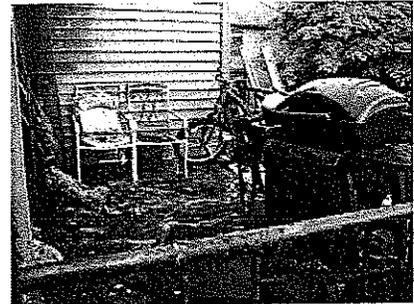
Safety Precautions for Residents: ***It is best not to use candles in Apartments but if you do:***



- Always keep burning candles within sight. Extinguish all candles when leaving a room or before going to sleep.
- Always use a candleholder specifically designed for candle use. The holder should be heat resistant, sturdy and large enough to contain any drips or melted wax.
- Place lit candles where they won't be knocked over by children, pets or anyone else.
- Keep burning candles away from items that can catch on fire such as furniture, drapes, bedding, carpets, books, paper, etc.

Outdoor Grilling Safety for Residents

Most grill fires occur during the summer months. The leading ignition factors in grill fires are mechanical failure or malfunction, combustibles placed too close to the heat, and cooking left on the grill unattended (USFA 2002).



Safety Precautions for Residents

- For gas grills, make certain the hose connection is tight and check the hoses for leaks. Turn the grill and fuel cylinder off immediately after grilling.
- For charcoal grills, avoid adding lighter fluid after the coals have been lit.
- Always place coals in a metal container with a tight lid after they have cooled for 48 hours.
- Never leave gas or charcoal grills unattended while cooking.
- Always use your grill outdoors and never barbecue in an enclosed area because carbon monoxide can accumulate and be deadly.
- Set-up your grill in an open area at least **10 feet away** from buildings, overhead combustible surfaces, dry leaves and brush.

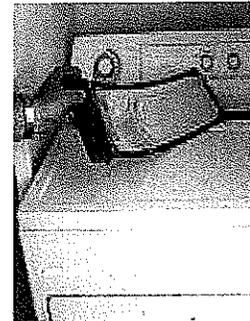


Clothes Dryer Safety for Residents

Each year, there are around 12,700 clothes dryer fires in residential buildings in the U.S. Failure to clean the lint screen is the leading factor contributing to clothes dryer fires in apartment buildings.

Safety Precautions for Residents

- Always remove lint from trap before using the clothes dryer.
- Regularly check dryer exhaust vent hoses behind the dryer for lint build up and clean. Bends and lint buildup in hoses can block airflow.
- Never put rubber, plastic, foam or any materials that made contact with flammable liquids in the dryer even if previously washed.
- Never leave dryer running while sleeping or out of the home.



Arson Safety for Residents

Arson is a crime that can happen at any time, any day of the year. The following steps will help keep apartment buildings from being the target of an arson crime.

Safety Precautions for Residents

- Lock doors and windows of your home and garage.
- Clean up wastepaper, long grass, weeds, litter, or anything that can burn from around buildings.
- Clear carport areas of anything that could fuel a fire.
- Do not allow dumpsters to become overfilled. Arrange for additional dumpsters or take refuse to transfer stations, if required.
- Locate commercial dumpsters and recycling bins at least five feet away from combustible walls and openings of roof eave lines. Use only metal or metal lined receptacles.
- Place locks on commercial dumpsters, if possible.
- Trim shrubbery away from doors and windows to improve visibility.
- Leave your indoor and outdoor lighting on during hours of darkness. Consider installing automatic or motion sensitive lights/devices (devices that automatically turn on outdoor lights



when they sense darkness or movement outside the home.)

CHAPTER 2

Requirements for Fire Emergency Guides

The International Fire Code (2008 Ed) sets minimum emergency planning and preparedness standards for multi-residential buildings. The Fire Emergency Guide is one requirement with which all apartment owners and managers should be familiar.

In accordance with Chapter 4 of the 2006 Fire Code (SFC SEC. 408.9), owners or managers of rental properties are required to develop and provide to residents a building specific Fire Emergency Guide. The Fire Emergency Guide will provide residents with a suggested evacuation plan and information about accessible fire protection equipment in the building.



One format option for the Fire Emergency Guide is to prepare a basic floor plan diagram for each floor of the building, being sure to include the points outlined in the box below. The Fire Emergency Guide should reflect the needs of your residents and the specifics of the building.

The building owner or manager should review the Fire Emergency Guide at least once a year. A copy of the guide should be given to each tenant when they move in or when changes are made.

The fire inspector will review the emergency guide during the fire inspection of each property.

As a minimum, the Fire Emergency Guide should contain the following:

- location of manual pull fire alarms.
- location of portable fire extinguishers.
- location of smoke alarms.
- exit routes from each apartment using the stairs, not elevators.
- location of outside assembly area for building occupants.
- instructions for those tenants unable to evacuate the building using stairwells.

SAMPLE

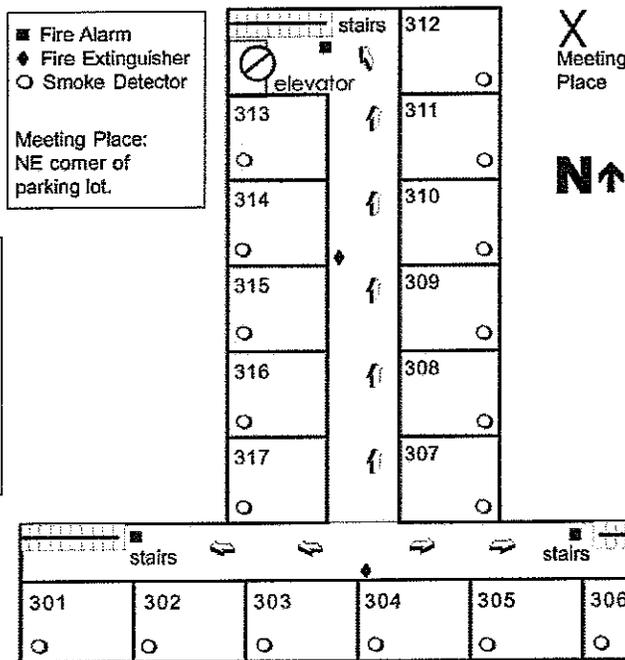
WHM Apartments Fire Emergency Guide

Building Fire Safety Equipment

1. The building is equipped with smoke alarms and a fire sprinkler system.
2. Portable fire extinguishers are located on every level next to each exit and Fire Alarm pull stations are located next to each exit stairwell.

Every alarm must be treated as a fire emergency. When you hear the fire alarm or if you encounter smoke or fire, take these steps to ensure a safe evacuation of the building.

1. Leave your unit as quickly as possible, closing the doors as you go. Pull the fire alarm next to the stairwell as you exit if fire alarm is not sounding.
2. Use the stairs, not the elevators, to evacuate the building.
3. Once outside, move away from the building to the designated meeting place. Do not congregate in the lobby. The meeting place is on the NE corner of the parking lot.
4. If you encounter smoke or fire outside of your apartment and you are unable to exit using the stairs, stay in your unit. Keep your door and windows closed. Use towels or clothing to block openings around doors or vents where smoke might enter.
5. Once you have left the building, do not go back into the building for any reason until the Fire Department has given permission to reenter.



Note:
The Emergency Guide must be customized for each situation.

CHAPTER 3

Fire Safety Planning

Staff Training

If your building has regular staff members, it is important that they have an understanding of their role in a fire emergency. Training should be provided for any tasks they may need to perform during a fire emergency. Particular attention should be paid to the following areas.

Prevention

Educate all employees as to the specific hazards in their working environment and how to prevent fires while conducting their assigned duties. Employee awareness can prevent fires and protect residents.

Evacuation

Staff members may be expected to manage the evacuation of the building during a fire emergency. Employees who are asked to fulfill this task must understand the building's evacuation plan for both ambulatory and non-ambulatory residents. Once residents are outside it is important to keep them informed in order to combat any fears or rumors.

Reporting

Any fire alarm must be treated as a real emergency and needs to be reported to the Fire Department, even if a central station monitoring company provides service to the building. One staff member should be assigned the responsibility of calling 9-1-1 from a safe telephone whenever the building alarm activates or a fire is reported. The caller should be prepared to provide information as it is requested by the dispatcher and should be able to stay on the telephone until instructed to hang up.

What is Real Fire Like?

- **Real fire is fast.** Once a fire begins, to flame it can double in size every 30 seconds. At this rate, a room can become fully involved in minutes.
- **Real fire is dark.** Fires produce large amounts of thick, black smoke that obscures vision, causes nausea and may even lead to unconsciousness or death. Three out of four people who die in residential fires die from smoke inhalation.
- **Real fire is hot.** A fire can cause the temperature at ceiling level to reach excesses of 1200 degrees Fahrenheit, at just 5 feet it can be 800 degrees. At this temperature, the superheated air will burn your lungs.
- **Real fire is unpredictable.** Each fire is unique. Some may smolder for hours filling a room with smoke. Others will burn at exceedingly high temperatures, consuming everything with flames.



For Assistance with staff training contact:
Community Risk Reduction Education at:
678-518-4850 or fireprograms@gwinnettcountry.com

Investigation

If the building's fire alarm panel provides information as to where the alarm is initiated, building staff may be able to investigate the source. Investigation does not eliminate the need to report the alarm to the Fire Department. Our recommendation is to contact 9-1-1- **first** then investigate. Anyone assigned to investigate a fire alarm must understand the danger of fire and know how to operate a portable fire extinguisher. Any information regarding the source of the fire alarm should be reported in a call to 9-1-1 as soon as possible.

If building staff determine that a fire alarm is false prior to the Fire Department's arrival, they should call 9-1-1 and relay the information to the dispatcher. The dispatcher will notify the responding fire companies that a false alarm has been reported. One fire company may continue to verify that the alarm is false. The Gwinnett County Fire Department will investigate all fire alarms. The building alarm may not be silenced without permission of the Fire Department or dispatcher.

Conducting Fire Drills

Staff fire drills are intended to test staff readiness and response to a fire emergency situation. It is important that staff fully understand their role in case of a fire alarm. Fire drills should replicate as closely as possible the activity expected in an actual emergency. In addition, fire drills should include a review of the plan and execution of assigned staff duties.

The following suggestions are provided to assist with the planning of staff fire drills:

- Prior to any drill, staff should be familiar with the building emergency plan and the details of their responsibilities. Encourage staff to discuss their concerns regarding the evacuation procedures.
- The drill for your building should include sounding the fire alarm. If your building fire alarm is monitored, notify the monitoring company of the drill immediately prior to its occurrence. Remember to contact the monitoring company again when the drill is completed. There is no need to notify the Fire Department.
- Keep a fire drill logbook to record fire drill activity. Records should include the date and time of each drill, the name of the person conducting the drill and other information pertinent to the drill.
- It is also recommended that you notify residents that the audible alarms will be sounded for the staff fire drill and invite them to participate.



Another recommendation is to keep records of fire drills and include the following information:

1. Identity of the person conducting the drill.
2. Date and time of the drill.
3. Notification method used.
4. Staff members on duty and participating.
5. Number of occupants evacuated.
6. Special conditions simulated.
7. Problems encountered.
8. Time required accomplishing the evacuation.

Alternate Fire Evacuation

“In some high-rise buildings, designed to protect occupants in place”

For those residents unable to use stairs to evacuate, the safest response to a fire emergency may be to remain in their apartments. As long as the fire is not in the individual apartment, that unit may be an area of refuge. An area of refuge provides protection from smoke and flames. Residents must be instructed that if they choose to stay in their units, their doors and windows must remain shut. If they feel they are in jeopardy, residents should use their telephone to call 9-1-1 to report their location and request immediate help.

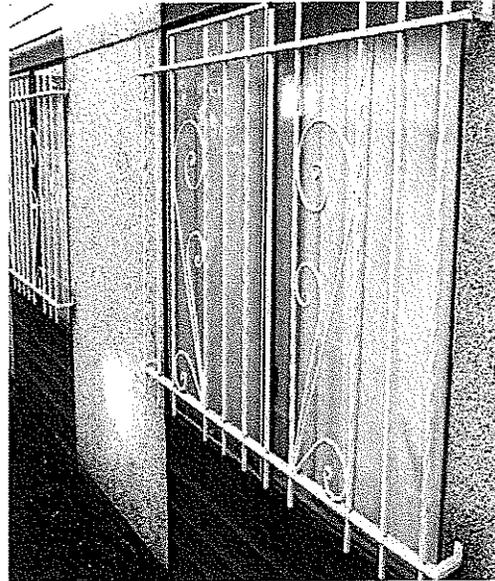
Residents who choose to stay in their units should be identified to the responding firefighters immediately upon their arrival.

For Assistance with in Planning and Conducting Fire Drills
Contact Community Risk Reduction Education at:
678-518-4850 or fireprograms@gwinnettcountry.com

Window Security Bars

If windows have security bars, it is important that residents understand how to open them for evacuation. Serious incidents have occurred where people have been trapped and died in fires because the security bars were permanently fixed or did not have quick release devices.

Every resident should understand and practice how to properly operate locked or barred windows and doors. Locked or barred doors should operate quickly and easily. Windows and doors with security bars should have quick-release devices to allow them to be opened immediately in an emergency. If the security bars are permanently fixed or do not have quick release devices, they should be replaced or retrofitted with release devices which meet Fire Code requirements.



CHAPTER 4

Fire Safety Inspections

Gwinnett County Fire Inspectors inspect buildings periodically to help ensure certain fire and life safety requirements are being met. The primary goal of the inspection program is to identify and remove potential fire safety hazards in a building's public areas.



To prepare for inspections, apartment managers should be aware of the following fire safety items.

Emergency Access

- The property's **street address should be clearly marked** and visible from the street.
- Fire lanes must remain clear** for emergency vehicles at all times. A congested parking lot can impede proper access to fire hydrants and fire lanes. A ladder truck can be eight to nine feet wide and up to 50-feet long.
- Fire Department **hose connections must have clear access** and be free of vegetation.
- Fire Hydrants must be visible and accessible and tested annually.

Fire Extinguishing Equipment

- Each floor, parking garage, and basement should have portable fire extinguishers. **Extinguishers must be installed** in identified locations on normal routes of travel and be accessible within 75 feet from any place on the floor. **Fire extinguishers must be maintained annually** by a licensed extinguisher technician and inspected monthly by apartment staff.
- If your building requires a tenant fire hose, the required hose and controlling nozzle must be in place and accessible.



Fire and Life Safety Systems

- Required fire and life safety **systems require maintenance and testing** on a routine schedule. Fire Inspectors will ask to review the annual sprinkler and alarm report. This includes items such as the fire alarm, sprinkler systems, standpipes, fire extinguishers.
- The person **testing the systems must be qualified** according to the Fire Code and Georgia State Fire Marshal's office.

Exits

- Exit and exit signs must be **clearly visible** and in working order.
- Exit ways must be **free of obstructions** and illuminated in hours of darkness.
- Fire **doors must close freely** and completely when released. Fire doors must **never be blocked open**.
- **Stairwells must be kept clear** and not used for storage. Storing combustibles under stairs is prohibited.

Code Violations

- The Fire Inspector who finds any fire hazard or safety issues during an inspection is required to issue an *Inspection Report* clearly indicating items to be corrected. Inspectors will typically follow up with additional inspections of the property to monitor what progress, if any, has been made to resolve the issues. If the problem is not corrected within the specified time frame, the Fire Marshal's Office initiates enforcement activities to gain compliance and ensure the safety of residents.

