

Retroactive Residential Fire Alarm Requirements

Who is affected by this requirement?

Multiple-story structures existing on January 1, 1975, used for human habitation, including, and limited to, apartment houses, hotels and motels wherein rooms used for sleeping are located above the ground floor.

Does this requirement pertain to all residential occupancies constructed prior to Jan. 1, 1975?

No. The requirement only pertains to the following:

- Every apartment house 3 or more stories in height or containing more than 15 apartments
- Every hotel / motel 3 or more stories in height or containing 20 or more guest rooms

Are there any exceptions to this requirement?

Yes. A fire alarm system need not be installed provided such apartment house or hotel / motel is separated by an unpierced wall of not less than 4-hour fire-resistance in buildings of Type IA, Type IIB, Type III or Type IV construction and 2-hour fire-resistance in buildings of all other types of construction provided that fire wall(s) meet the following:

- Fire wall(s) separate fire areas so as not to exceed the number of apartments or guest rooms stipulated.
- Fire wall(s) conforms to the requirements of California Building Code (CBC) Section 706.6, Vertical Continuity, extending from the foundation to a termination point not less than 30 inches above both adjacent roofs; or otherwise complies with CBC Section 706.6.
- Fire wall(s) complies with all other applicable provisions of the CBC.
- Fire wall(s) extends to all outer edges of horizontal projecting elements, such as balconies, roof overhangs, canopies, marquees or architectural projections.
- No openings are permitted for air ducts or similar penetrations, except that openings for pipes, conduits and electrical outlets of copper, sheet steel or ferrous material shall be permitted through such wall(s) and need not be protected, provided they do not unduly impair the required fire resistance of the assembly.
- Tolerances around such penetrations shall be filled with approved noncombustible materials.

What type of fire alarm system needs to be installed?

An automatic or manually operated fire alarm system capable of warning all building occupants simultaneously and designed in accordance with the California Fire Code. Visual and audible notification shall be provided throughout the building, in accordance with the current edition of the California Fire Code.

Do I need to complete this before my fire inspector will sign off on my inspection?

No. Your inspector will need to see that you have initiated the permit process by hiring a contractor who will submit plans to the Development Services Department (DSD). Once you have obtained a project number from DSD, you may provide this to your inspector who will document this number on your report before closing it out. An implementation plan may be developed to allow adequate time to install the fire alarm system.

How do I start the permit process?

Contact a licensed (C-10 Electrical) fire alarm contractor to obtain a fire alarm permit prior to any construction, modifications, alternations, etc. General information on DSD requirements, as well as detailed information on the permitting process is contained in the links below. In addition, DSD provides many Forms and Publications to assist applicants throughout the permit process. Some pertinent publications are listed here and may be obtained online:

- Information Bulletin 137, How to Obtain a Permit for Fire Alarm Systems
- Information Bulletin 506, Fee Schedule for Fire Fees
- Technical Bulletin FIRE-9-2, Requirements for Fire Alarm Control Panels
- Technical Bulletin FIRE-9-4, Fire Alarm Wiring
- Technical Bulletin FIRE-9-9, Fire Alarm Systems Required in Existing Group R-1/R-2 occupancies

DSD Home: <https://www.sandiego.gov/development-services>

DSD Permits: <https://www.sandiego.gov/development-services/permits-inspections>

DSD Forms & Publications: <https://www.sandiego.gov/development-services/forms-publications>

Questions?

If you have questions on obtaining a Fire Alarm Permit, contact DSD at 619-446-5151.