

What is the Purpose of Annual Inspections?

Annual inspections are performed by the South San Francisco Fire Department to assess and mitigate potential fire and life safety hazards in our city. These inspections vary in type and frequency, depending on the occupancy type and use. To better prepare for an inspection it's important to have some understanding of the codes, standards, and ordinances in the City of South San Francisco and how they may affect your inspection.

Codes tell you what requirements need to be met, and what features of fire protection must be installed (e.g. fire-sprinkler system, fire-alarm system, etc.). The processes or products used in a building may also require different systems or protection that must be inspected and serviced.

While many people look at the fire and life safety inspection process negatively, these inspections benefit the building/business owners and occupants, by offering:

- A safer working/living environment for employees/residents.
- A safer building for unfamiliar occupants.
- Business and job security. Up to 80% of all small businesses that experience a large fire never re-open; this not only affects the building/business owner, but also results in the loss of jobs.
- A better maintained building for improved resale value.
- A possible reduction in insurance premiums. Many insurance carriers give businesses premium reductions for properly installed and maintained fire-protection systems.

What will the Fire Inspector look for?

Preparing for the annual inspection is the key to developing a good working relationship with the fire inspector and gaining positive results. Using the guidelines below can help you prepare for the inspection. The annual inspection will be unscheduled, depending on occupancy type and hours of operation.

Make sure a responsible person is available to accompany the fire inspector with keys to all areas. Even though a violations notice report will be mailed to you, it's always recommended that you take notes since your notes may give you additional insight into the inspector's thought process and may provide valuable information for future inspections. If the fire inspector finds problems, the inspector will spend more time checking additional equipment. It's better to make sure that any equipment the fire inspector may check has been properly serviced and maintained. There are companies that will perform testing and maintenance on many of these items in one visit, such as emergency lighting, exit signs, fire extinguishers, and alarm systems. Review the violations notice report and make corrections prior to your re-inspection.

The following issues are a few of the common reasons for non-compliance:

Fire Protection Systems

- Provide documentation that fire extinguishers, automatic sprinkler systems and fire alarm systems have current annual service tags.
- Fire extinguishers are required to be visible and accessible. Fire detection, alarm and suppression systems shall be maintained operational.
- Provide documentation which shows the kitchen hood suppression system is serviced every 6 months.
- Provide Cooking Class K extinguisher within 30ft of cooking equipment involving vegetable or animal oils and fats or solid fuel cooking appliances.

Fire Service Access

- Address numbers are required to be plainly visible from the street.
- Fire lanes must not be obstructed.
- Three feet of clear space around circumference of fire hydrants and fire department connections (FDC) are required.

Means of Egress/Exits

- Exits are required to be easily recognizable and are not permitted to be obstructed.
- Lighting is required for corridors, stairways, and exterior exit ways. If main exit uses key locking hardware, must post sign which reads "This door must remain unlocked during business hours".
- Additional doors other than the main door are required to be readily operable from the inside without the use of a key or special knowledge.
- Exit signs are required to be internally or externally illuminated at all times, bulbs and battery backup must be maintained.

Fire Protection

- Self-closing fire doors are not permitted to be blocked open.
- Fire resistance rated walls and ceilings are required to be maintained and intact.
- Provide annual inspection of sliding and rolling fire doors.

Electrical

- Maintain clear access to electrical panel, at least 30" wide, 36" in front, and 78" high.
- Extension cords are only permitted for temporary applications.
- Power strips that are polarized or grounded and equipped with over current protection listed in accordance with UL 1363 are permitted.
- Power strips, extension cords or any other electrical cords shall not extend through walls, ceilings, floors, under doors or floor coverings, or be subject to damage.
- Discontinue use of extension cords not plugged directly into an approved receptacle, power tap or multi-plug adapter.

- Electrical cords must be maintained in good condition without splices, deterioration or damage.
- Electrical outlets, switches and junction boxes are required to be properly covered with plates.
- Electric panel breakers are required to be accurately labeled.

Housekeeping

- Combustible materials in buildings are required maintained in an orderly manner. Maintain storage materials a minimum of 2 feet below the ceiling in buildings without a sprinkler system.
- Maintain storage materials a minimum of 18 inches below sprinkler heads in buildings with sprinkler systems.
- Storage of combustible materials is not permitted in exits or exit enclosures, boiler rooms, mechanical rooms or electrical equipment rooms.
- Storage of combustible materials in attic, under-floor and concealed spaces is prohibited unless protected by 1-hour fire-resistive construction.
- Materials susceptible to spontaneous ignition, such as oily rags will be stored in a listed disposal container (self-closing lids).
- Storage of dumpsters in buildings or placed within 5 feet of combustible walls, openings, or under roof eaves is not permitted.
- All compressed gas containers are required to be chained to prevent tipping.

Finalizing the Inspection Process

Ask questions and make sure you fully understand all issues. If there are corrections required, the building occupant must identify who is responsible for making these corrections. In many cases, the building occupant and business owner are responsible, by lease agreement, for different items. If there are costly items requiring attention, discuss alternatives and compliance timeframes with the inspector. Most fire inspectors are willing to negotiate a longer time period since the inspector is most interested in gaining compliance and making your building safer without causing you financial difficulties. Not all compliance items cost a great deal of money or require great effort; in fact many can be operational issues and are easily corrected. Thank you for your cooperation and support.

To contact the Fire Prevention Division, please call (650) 829-6645.