

FAIRFAX COUNTY GUIDELINES FOR FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEM THIRD-PARTY INSPECTIONS

Virginia Construction Code 2021

April 2024

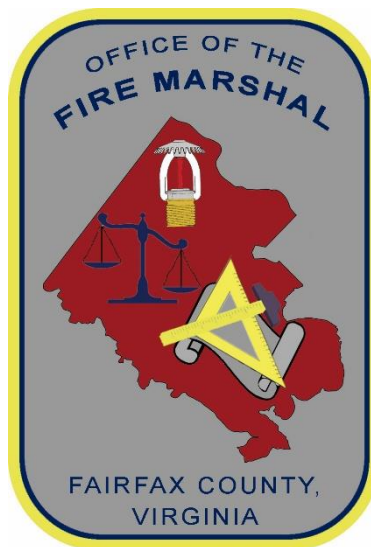


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents 2

Third-Party Inspections of Fire Protection Systems..... 3

Project Qualifications..... 3

Definitions..... 4

Inspection Firm Qualifications 4

General Requirements for Third-Party Inspections 5

 Phased Occupancy: 5

 Concealment: 5

 As-Builts: 5

 Inspection Reports: 5

 Notes: 6

THIRD-PARTY INSPECTIONS OF FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEMS

The Third-Party Inspections Program, authorized through the [Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code](#), provides for private-sector inspection firms to perform inspections of residential or commercial projects that would otherwise be conducted by county inspectors.

By delegated authority from the Fairfax County Building Official, the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) for fire protection systems is the [Office of the Fire Marshal](#).

Inspections shall not be conducted until third-party personnel have been approved by the Office of the Fire Marshal, permits issued, and county-approved documents are available on the job site.

PROJECT QUALIFICATIONS

Qualifying inspections of fire protection systems in residential or commercial building construction that are typically inspected by an Office of the Fire Marshal Inspector are listed below. These inspection types are eligible to be inspected in the program up to and including final inspection:

Water-Based Fire Protection Systems:

- Fire sprinkler systems
- Fire pumps
- Standpipes
- Underground fire service lines
- Piping and attached appurtenances

Fire Alarm and Detection Systems:

- Fire alarm devices
- System components
- Control equipment

Alternative Extinguishing Systems:

- Wet chemical extinguishing systems
- Dry chemical extinguishing systems
- Foam-extinguishing systems
- Gas-based extinguishing systems including carbon dioxide, halon, and clean-agent
- Automatic water mist systems
- Aerosol fire-extinguishing systems

***** NO INSPECTIONS SHALL BE CONDUCTED WITHOUT COUNTY-APPROVED FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEM PLANS. *****

This program does not apply to:

- [Special inspections](#) related to smoke control and smoke management systems. See Smoke Control Inspection Manual.
- Special locking arrangements. These devices must be inspected by an Office of the Fire Marshal Inspector
- Elevator inspections, this is handled by a third-party firm contracted by Fairfax County

- Any inspections conducted by other Fairfax County agencies.

The complete project or portions thereof may be third-party inspected. All third-party inspections require prior approval by the Office of the Fire Marshal and will be evaluated on a project-by-project basis *prior* to conducting any inspections.

DEFINITIONS

The terms below have specific meanings for the purposes of this program.

- **Approved fire protection system plans:** County-stamped fire protection systems plans.
- **Building core and shell:** The basic configuration and construction of a building or structure, with the “shell” structure and “core” public areas and services.
- **Building shell:** The overall structure of foundations, exterior walls, columns, floors, and roof including stairways, shafts, elevator hoistways, common area corridors, grade exit passageways and all fire suppression systems throughout the building.
- **Building core:** Public areas and services including lobbies, required accessible features, restrooms, primary and emergency electrical services, plumbing water and sewer services and HVAC systems.
- **Conventional building construction:** The components and elements of buildings and structures that are not subject to special inspections as defined by Chapter 17 of the Virginia Construction Code.
- **Inspection:** The observation of construction and the performance of tests to establish conformance with county-approved documents, the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code, and this program.
- **Phased Occupancy:** A process that allows for incremental or phased occupancy of a building.
- **RDP:** Registered Design Professional
- **Stocking Permission:** Permission to stock shelves prior to final inspection and certificate of occupancy.

INSPECTION FIRM QUALIFICATIONS

Listed below are the qualifications of the inspection firms RDP of responsible charge and their associated field staff.

- Inspections firms must be employed directly by the project owner, be independent of project contractors, and have no personal financial interest in the project.
- Both the inspections firm and its personnel must be pre-approved by the Office of the Fire Marshal on a project-by-project basis.
- Inspections must be conducted under the direct supervision of, and certified by, an RDP.
- As of July 1, 2021, all inspectors conducting the inspection must be NICET Level II, or higher, and certified in the discipline they are inspecting.
- For fire protection systems, this link provides a list of approved [RDPs](#)

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THIRD-PARTY INSPECTIONS

PRIOR TO STARTING INSPECTIONS BY THE THIRD-PARTY FIRMS, THE [THIRD-PARTY REQUEST FORM](#) SHALL BE SUBMITTED AND APPROVED BY THE OFFICE OF THE FIRE MARSHAL.

This section discusses the general guidelines addressing all third-party inspections of fire protection systems. **All inspections shall be conducted with county-approved fire protection system plans.**

Phased Occupancy:

For buildings with an approved phased occupancy, an initial meeting with Office of the Fire Marshal representatives is required. The following representatives must attend:

- Owner's agent
- General Contractor
- Fire Protection Design Engineer (if applicable)
- Third-Party Inspection Fire Protection Engineer
- Third-Party Inspector for all fire protection systems

Concealment:

No component shall be concealed until approved by the Building Official.

As-Builts:

- Staff from third-party inspections firms shall not suggest, direct, or authorize the fabricator, erector, or contractor to deviate from county-approved documents or the building code without written approval by the responsible architect, structural engineer, geotechnical engineer, fire official, and/or the building official, as appropriate. Permit/record will not pass until as-built(s) are submitted and approved by the Plan Reviewer.

Inspection Reports:

Inspection reports shall include the following:

- Street address to include floor and/or suite number when applicable.
- The building, sprinkler, fire alarm and alternative extinguishing system permit number(s) as appropriate.
- A description of the area inspected.
- Inspection results (approved or rejected). If the inspection is rejected, deficiencies and the corresponding code sections violated shall be included.
- Where appropriate, photographs should be attached.
- A statement issued, digitally signed, and sealed by the responsible RDP, which indicates the inspected item(s), in their opinion and to the best of their knowledge, complies with the county-approved documents, the requirements of the *Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code* and the applicable NFPA standard.
- The Record of Inspection and Testing (NFPA 72, *National Fire and Signaling Code*), the Contractor's Material and Test Certificate for Aboveground Piping (NFPA 13, *Installation of Sprinkler Systems*) and any other documentation required by the relevant standards must be submitted. These

forms must be filled out in their entirety and signed. Referencing plans is **not** acceptable. The inspection report shall be rejected if these forms are not filled out. If the RDP or their field personnel are to be replaced completely.

- The owner is responsible for maintaining the system.
- The owner is responsible for ensuring that communication is clear on inspections between all contractors and third-party engineers.

Notes:

- If the RDP or their field personnel are to be replaced, the replacement personnel shall require approval by the Office of the Fire Marshal – Acceptance Testing Branch.
- Any personnel from an inspections firm approving work not in conformance with this policy, county-approved plans and the applicable codes and standards will lose their ability to perform future inspections and shall be removed from the approved list.
- Staff from third-party inspections firms shall not suggest, direct or authorize the fabricator, erector or contractor to deviate from county-approved documents or the building code without written approval by the responsible architect, structural engineer or geotechnical engineer, fire official, and/or the building official, as appropriate.

Contact the Office of the Fire Marshal at 703-246-4806 or at fire.acceptancetesting@fairfaxcounty.gov with any questions concerning this information.