

U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Office of Public and Indian Housing

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Special Attention of: NOTICE PIH 99-11 (HA)

Secretary's Representatives;

State and Area Coordinators;

Issued: February 17, 1999

Public Housing Hub Directors, Program

Center Coordinators, Troubled Agency

Expires: February 28, 2000

Recovery Center Directors and Special

Applications Center Director; Administrators,

Offices of Native American Programs;

Public Housing Agencies; Section 8 PHAs,

Tribally Designated Housing Entities (TDHEs);

Resident Management Corporations

Subject: Fire Safety

1. Purpose: The purpose of this Notice is to prevent loss of life and injury in public and Indian housing developments due to fire.
2. Applicability: This Notice applies to the following housing programs under the jurisdiction of the Office of Public and Indian Housing:
 - a. Existing public and Indian housing projects
 - b. Public and Indian Housing Development
 - c. Public and Indian Housing Modernization
 - d. Section 8
 - Tenant-Based Rental Certificates/Vouchers
 - Project-Based Rental Certificates
 - Moderate Rehabilitation
 - e. HOPE Programs for Public and Indian Housing
 - f. Indian Housing Units Assisted Under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act
3. Background: In an effort to maximize the safety of residents, housing authority staff and fire and rescue personnel, particularly in high-rise buildings, it is imperative that all public housing agencies, Tribes and Tribally Designated Housing Entities (hereafter collectively referred to as HAs) and Section 8 owners comply with the provisions of the Fire Administration Authorization Act of 1992 (the Act). In September 1995, the Department issued a "Guide for the Implementation of PL 102-522 for Fire Alarm and Automatic Sprinkler Installations." This publication addresses three provisions of the Act affecting

HUD-assisted housing: (1) four-story or higher multifamily buildings that are newly constructed after October 26, 1992, and for which: (i) housing assistance is used for the construction or (ii) a binding commitment is made, before construction begins, to provide housing assistance for the newly constructed property must be protected with an automatic sprinkler system and hard-wired smoke detectors both of which must be installed in accordance with NFPA requirements; (2) rebuilt, four-story or higher multifamily buildings that are rebuilt after October 1, 1994 and for which housing assistance is used to (i.) rebuild the property or (ii) a binding commitment is made before rebuilding begins, to provide housing assistance for the rebuilt property must be in compliance with Chapter 19 of National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 101, the “Life Safety Code” which includes requirements such as hard-wired smoke detectors, automatic sprinkler systems, egress systems, emergency lighting, etc. and (3) **all** other dwelling units receiving housing assistance must be protected by hard-wired or battery-operated smoke detectors installed in compliance with NFPA 72. The Guide can be obtained from HUD User by calling 1 800 245-2691.

4. Sprinkler Systems Inspections: For their respective properties, HAs and Section 8 owners should ensure that sprinkler systems are designed, installed, maintained and inspected to assure proper operation on **all floors** and in all spaces; require management follow-up on all properties to ensure that inspections are conducted , identified corrections needed are completed and that required record keeping is maintained. Local Fire Department Officials should be invited and encouraged to conduct pre-plan tours of all properties to become familiar with the properties’ layout, operation and specific occupant mix (see #5 below). Particular care should be taken by HAs and Section 8 owners to ensure that subsequent maintenance work such as painting, plastering or other work by their staff or contractors does not inadvertently cover up or hide access to sprinkler system or standpipe building connections.
5. Preplanning Visits: HAs and Section 8 owners, for their respective properties, should invite and coordinate preplanning tours/visits with local fire department(s) to ensure that responding emergency fire services are familiar with:
 - the structure
 - built-in fire and emergency equipment
 - operational issues that could affect fire fighting
 - occupant mix of the facility having impact on fire fighting
 - overall size and design of structures
 - key building personnel and procedures for contacting them during an emergency.

Of specific interest to fire service personnel will be their coordination of local fire fighting standard operational procedures as related to the tactics likely to be used during an emergency in the facility. Issues like the size of hose connections

and points of supply for fire fighting hose can vary with local fire departments. Issues such as the diameter of the hose, minimum amount of fire hose needed to reach a given area and locations of water supply connections can become critical for fire incident commanders, therefore, pre-planning visits and coordination are essential **before** a fire occurs.

Although fire fighting tactics may vary from fire to fire, fires in high-rise structures are extremely dangerous and require a very precise delivery of resources, coordinated attack, sufficient water supply and evacuation of residents. Therefore, it is essential that local fire departments visit properties and pre-plan their probable response to future emergencies likely to be encountered.

6. **Self-Closing Doors:** Self-closing doors are an effective method for slowing down the spread of a fire providing sometimes critical, life-saving time for fire and rescue personnel to do their job and allow individuals to escape the fire or be rescued. It is imperative that where such doors are in place or required that they are unobstructed and that the self-closing mechanisms are fully operational at all times. In some situations, particularly in high-rise residential (elderly and family) buildings, residents may disable such self-closing mechanisms to avoid accidental lock-outs when temporarily stepping into a hallway or visiting a nearby neighbor. Such self-closing mechanisms should be included as a routine inspection item to ensure proper operation of the mechanism. In situations where the mechanism is not functioning due to resident action, management should treat this as a violation of the lease and take appropriate action on a case by case basis. The importance of the proper functioning of self-closing doors should be addressed during regular, on-going resident education programs on fire safety arranged by the HA and Section 8 owners for their respective properties and conducted by local/State Fire Department officials. Additionally, emergency egress doors in residential properties should never be locked from the inside barring emergency egress. There are some exceptions to this in certain types of facilities, however, where this is necessary there are specific procedures that must be followed in accordance with local/State requirements.
7. **Smoke Detectors:** Where battery operated smoke detectors are permitted, the removal of batteries from smoke detectors by residents is a serious problem which should to the extent authorized under the lease, be considered a lease violation and appropriate action taken on a case by case basis. Due to extensive problems with residents removing batteries, consideration should be given to replace battery operated smoke detectors in existing units with hard-wired detectors (with battery back-up) whenever possible - for example, when other wiring upgrades occur in a unit(s) or if wall finishes are being replaced in unit(s). Since a missing battery in a battery operated smoke detector will fail a unit during the Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS) inspection, the use of hard-wired smoke detectors should improve PHAS scores. Even though there may still be a problem with resident removal of back-up batteries, hard-wired detectors will increase

protection even with back-up batteries removed except in situations where power failure occurs.

8. Fire Safety Inspections: Most model and local codes require that facilities be inspected periodically by appropriate local/State officials having jurisdiction over the property (for example: local/State fire officials and/or local building officials). HAs and Section 8 owners, for their respective properties, should ensure that appropriate local officials who are responsible, are conducting required inspections, ensuring that code violations (or suggested improvements) are being appropriately addressed, and that local fire department(s) are encouraged to conduct pre-plan visits to properties. For instance, some of the primary standards affecting the fire safety, maintenance and operation of properties are found in National Fire Protection Association documents as follows:

- o Sprinkler Systems NFPA 25
- o Standpipe Systems NFPA 14
- o Fire Alarm Systems NFPA 72
- o Fire Extinguishers NFPA 10
- o Emergency Exits/Lighting NFPA 101

To obtain these standards, contact the NFPA at 1 800 344-3555.

(Note: Property owners are responsible for ensuring that all fire protection systems and features are always in operating order in accordance with local/State codes which typically reference the NFPA standards and there are inspection protocols and records maintenance to be followed by HAs and property owners that are included in these standards.)

9. Evacuation Plan: HAs and Section 8 owners, for their respective properties, should ensure that there is a viable evacuation plan in effect that has been developed in consultation with local/State Fire Officials and ensure that residents, staff and the Fire Department are aware of the evacuation plan through ongoing Fire Safety education programs. HAs and Section 8 owners should confer with local/State Fire Officials to plan and schedule recommended fire drills for their properties to test the effectiveness of evacuation plans and ensure that all involved are familiar with evacuation procedures. Such procedures should address a variety of occupancy types and buildings. For example, special procedures and training will need to be developed, in conjunction with local/State fire officials, for buildings that house primarily elderly persons including those with mobility problems, disabled persons and or families with children.

10. Fire Safety Training: HAs and Section 8 owners, for their respective properties, should ensure that residents are provided information and training on how to prevent fires and what to do in the event of a fire including information for residents of high-rise buildings on what to do when a fire occurs and techniques for surviving a fire. Such information should be provided to all new residents upon leasing an apartment. This information and training can be provided by local/State Fire Officials. Training for residents and staff should be conducted on a regular, recurring basis - at least once each year. It is recommended that a "Fire Safety Awareness Day" coinciding with National Fire Prevention Week be held by owners each year for their properties. Also, a hot-line for reporting fire safety violations could be established either in conjunction with the locality or property management.

(Note: Where HAs are conducting inspections of Section 8 or other assisted housing - such inspections should, at a minimum, address numbers 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 above)

HAs are responsible for disseminating this Notice to current and future property owners involved in their programs whose units are receiving assistance under 2d, e and f above.

Resources/Publications:

U. S. Fire Administration
Federal Emergency Management Agency
16825 South Seaton Avenue
Emmitsburg, Maryland 21727
Telephone: (301) 447-1000

Guide for Implementation of PL 102-522 for Fire
Alarm and Automatic Sprinkler Installations
HUD User - Telephone 1 (800) 245-2691

National Fire Protection Association
1 Batterymarch Park
Quincy, MA 02269-9101
Telephone: (617) 770-3000
(Note: For NFPA Standards Publications and
technical assistance)

/s/ Harold Lucas
Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing