

COMMUNIQUÉ

du commissaire des incendies

June 25, 2020

No. 2020-14

COVID-19 EMERGENCY AND VULNERABLE OCCUPANCIES

On March 17, 2020, Ontario declared a state of emergency as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The provincial Declaration of Emergency enables the government to make and amend, as needed, emergency orders that protect the health and safety of all Ontarians. As such, orders made under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*, require the operation of businesses and the delivery of services to be in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials.

Under [Ontario Regulation 364/13](#), fire departments are required to observe fire drills and conduct fire safety inspections, as directed by the Fire Marshal, for every care occupancy, care and treatment occupancy and retirement home (“vulnerable occupancies”) for which an annual fire drill is required by Sentence 2.8.3.2.(6) of Division B of the Fire Code. In addition, [Fire Marshal Directive 2014-002](#) provides direction to Assistants to the Fire Marshal on fire drill scenario approvals, fire drill observations, and fire safety inspections required by the regulation. The requirements of O. Reg. 364/13 and Fire Marshal Directive 2014-002 have not been suspended and continue to be in effect.

It is recognized that during the current state of emergency and in future phases of reopening, there may be instances where standard procedures for observing fire drills and conducting fire safety inspections may not align with public health instructions. In these cases, fire departments are encouraged to exercise discretion and flexibility in supporting compliance efforts with both fire safety and public health. This may include re-scheduling fire drills and / or extending the timeline between observing a fire drill and conducting a fire safety inspection. Until such time as regular activities to comply with O. Reg. 364/13 and the associated directive can be safely and operationally resumed, fire departments may wish to consider undertaking a combination of interim measures to continue supporting fire safety in vulnerable occupancies. Some examples that may be combined and considered on a case-by-case basis include:

1. Remote Options

Technology provides many options for fire departments to coordinate with facility staff to observe activities remotely. This may be done through the use of cell phones, cameras, laptops, drones, or other devices. Observations that are conducted remotely may assist with assessing compliance and addressing deficiencies.

2. Records Review

A comprehensive review of records for fire safety systems, supervisory staff training, and fire safety procedures may be undertaken, along with detailed discussions with facility supervisory staff. Reviewing inspection, test, and maintenance records, combined with any further information provided by the facility owner or operator such as interviews with staff, photos, or video, may alleviate immediate fire safety concerns for the facility.

3. Table Talk Drills

While not intended to replace approved fire drill procedures and scenarios under normal circumstances, the chief fire official may wish to consider the option of table talk drills during the state of emergency.

4. Training

The Chief Fire Official may wish to review with the facility owner / operator the possible need for training of staff, including temporary staff, to ensure awareness of fire safety responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This training may be used to highlight any measures that must be taken in a fire emergency, and any enhanced protocols due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Partial Observations and Inspections

If access to certain portions of the facility does not present any conflict with public health guidance, partial observations and inspections should be conducted where possible.

Fire departments are encouraged to work together with owners and operators to ensure a continued level of fire safety for vulnerable occupancies. This includes the use of interim measures where standard procedures for observing annual fire drills and conducting fire safety inspections cannot be carried out in compliance with public health guidance. The Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management acknowledges that there are compliance challenges during these unprecedented times and will work to support fire departments in their efforts to ensure fire safety for vulnerable occupancies.

For assistance with evaluating options to address fire safety in vulnerable occupancies, please contact your local Field and Advisory Services adviser or the Field and Advisory Services general telephone number at 1-844-638-9560.