High-Rise Evacuation Drills

July 2020

Annual evacuation drills for high rise buildings, with participation by all employees, are essential to increase the successful, orderly and immediate evacuation of occupants in the event of a real emergency. They are required by law within the City of Bellevue and the State of Washington.

Considerable time and resources are devoted to ensuring that efficient, effective drills occur and that they serve a number of purposes which benefit occupants, building management and the fire department:

- Familiarize occupants with all possible exits. Most employees arrive at their workplace via the elevators and have often never entered the exit stairways.
- Evaluate the evacuation process which includes occupant behavior, egress times, assembly points and accountability for personnel.
- Evaluate the building systems which include performance of the fire alarm system, smoke control systems, fire doors and elevators.
- Familiarize fire department personnel with the building and its unique fire protection systems and lend a sense of realism to the occupants by having firefighters respond by entering the building.

The evacuation drills are required to be held at unexpected times and under varying conditions to simulate the unusual conditions that occur in the event of a real emergency. The most efficient use of your time is to fully participate in the planned evacuation drills. This is your opportunity to ensure that all occupants and/or employees are comfortable with their roles in the event of a fire and, if not, to provide additional information and/or training to account for their unique needs.

While the Bellevue Fire Department understands that the evacuation drills have an impact on your time, the drills are completed in a relatively short period of approximately 15 minutes which is a small investment for the safety of your employees. The Bellevue Fire Department expects full and immediate participation in these drills.

If you decide that you cannot participate in the evacuation drill, you are still obligated to provide training for your staff and participate in an evacuation on your own time and expense.

Fire Department's Role in Evacuation Drills

- You may see Bellevue Fire Department employees during one of your evacuation drills. Our role is to: observe the overall evacuation process and provide feedback to the building owner/manager
- Observe how the fire/life safety systems, elevators and fire doors perform in an alarm condition
- Firefighters may also respond to the alarm just as they would to reports of a fire. This is a drill for them, helps to familiarize them with the building and its fire/life safety system and lends a sense of realism to the drill.

Virtual Drills

Virtual drills are allowed to substitute for actual drills, provided:

1. The virtual drill is specific to the building
2. Occupants of the building are required to conduct a "safety walk" within 30 days of the virtual drill and visit locations of fire extinguishers on their evacuation floor, all exit stairs on their floor and their assigned assembly points.
3. The Building Engineer or other qualified personnel must place the building into alarm off hours and verify that stairs doors unlock, fire doors that are on hold open devices release, pressurization fans activate, elevators recall etc. Ideally this is coordinated with the annual confidence testing.
4. Full evacuation drills are required:

- Every three years
- When the evacuation scenario has substantially changed (i.e. from phased evacuation to full evacuation)
- When the fire alarm system has been upgraded or replaced
- When requested by the Fire Marshal