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White Paper

5 Important Steps to Avoid Troublesome and Costly Fire Code Violations

Today's building owners and facility managers are facing tough challenges in the aftermath of 9/11. One of those challenges is dealing with unexpected or unplanned visits from state and local building inspectors on the prowl for fire code violations.

It's true that building inspectors have become stricter than before, "tagging" buildings for the smallest of reasons, especially when it comes to fire codes. More and more, they are challenging maintenance teams and failing buildings for fire code violations that used to pass muster before. And you know what that could mean -- Steep fines and/or costly retrofits that must be completed quickly – sometimes required within ten days!

If you own or manage a commercial building, chances are you have passive fire protection systems in place, such as spray applied fireproofing, firestopping, intumescent coatings, and fire-rated walls and doors. Unlike active fire protection, which is designed to detect and suppress fires and only kick on once a fire has started (think sprinkler systems and extinguishers), passive fire protection is always at work, helping to prevent the spread of fire.

Passive fire protection is a key element in the overall performance of a building, and routine maintenance of these products through testing and inspection will keep them in tip-top shape. Here are the steps you should take to test and inspect your passive fire protections systems in order to avoid fire code violations and the fines associated with them– as well as keep your building performing in actual building fire conditions.

1. **Know where all the passive fire protection systems are located in the building**. This is as easy as reviewing the construction documentsð including any life-safety drawingsð for the building. These drawings indicate where fire-rated components are located.

2. **Identify all areas throughout the building/structure that have undergone a renovation or upgrade since the previous inspection**. Commercial structures undergo renovations and upgrades related to tenant change, as well as use and occupancy change. As a result, partitions and walls may be removed, electrical wiring re-directed, mechanical equipment removed/replaced, and roof systems changed. When these types of renovations/upgrades occur, passive fire protections systems are susceptible to damage and/or failure.

3. **Visually inspect the aforementioned areas and note all passive fire protection deficiencies**, such as material that has been removed, is damaged, missing or falling off. Also check thickness and adhesion/cohesion characteristics to make sure they meet current guidelines. Keeping in line with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and International Code Council (ICC) code requirements will ensure you're in compliance.

4. **Reach out to professionals if you find deficiencies**. If any products or systems are damaged, missing, falling off, or donôt meet thickness guidelines, reach out to professionals for help. Consulting with a fire-protection engineer or installer will set you on the right path toward compliance. An installer, especially, will help you repair or replace the deficiencies.

5. **Know what's going on in your building at all times.** Keep your eyes open for any changes in your passive fire protection systems as a result of renovations or upgrades. Implementing a plan for periodic inspection and maintenance, to include walk-throughs and visual inspections, will help you keep on top of thingsð not to mention save your hide should a pop-up inspection catch you by surprise.

The bottom line is, you canôt afford to not have effective passive fire protection in your building. Life safety should be your number one concern, and keeping your fire-protection systems well maintained will go a long way in preventing fires and saving lives.

Further Reading:

The following test methods developed by the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) and publication developed by the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries (AWCI) shall be consulted for specific information on testing and inspection of SFRMs:

ÅASTM E605-93 (2000) ï ñStandard Test Methods for Thickness and Density of Sprayed Fire Resistive Material (SFRM) Applied to Structural Membersò

ÅASTM E736-00 -- ñStandard Test Method for Cohesion / Adhesion of Sprayed Fire Resistive Material Applied to Structural Membersò

ÅAWCI ï ñTechnical Manual 12-A Third Edition ï Standard Practice for the Testing and Inspection of Field Applied Sprayed Fire-Resistive Materials; An Annotated Guideò

Ace Resources, Inc. installs commercial and residential insulation, soundproofing and fire-resistive materials. The company also closes in-place underground storage tanks with foam. For more information or to schedule an Insulation or Fireproofing Audit contact the company.

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