



# EL DORADO COUNTY REGIONAL FIRE PROTECTION STANDARD

## Safety Requirements for Haunted Houses

STANDARD #F-001

EFFECTIVE 07-31-2014

### PURPOSE

This guide is intended to provide fire safety standards and regulations for the construction and operation of temporary haunted attractions/events that are open to the public.

### SCOPE

These regulations shall apply to temporary Houses, Ghosts Walks, or similar amusement uses open to the public where combustible, decorative material and confusing sounds and/or visual effects are present.

### AUTHORITY

2013 California Building Code, 2013 California Fire Code, and the California Code of Regulations, Title 19.

### DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this guideline, certain terms and words are defined as follows:

**Haunted House:** A temporary, permanent or mobile building or structure, or portion thereof, which contains a system that transports or conveys passengers or provides a walkway along, around, over, or through a course in any direction as a form of amusement arranged so that the egress path is not readily apparent due to visual, audio or theatrical distractions, or an intentionally confounded egress path, or not visible due to low illumination, are disguised or are not readily available due to the method of transportation or conveyance through the building or structure.

**Ghost Walks:** Similar to a Haunted House and may include both indoor and outdoor areas where the means of egresses to a public way is similarly not readily identifiable.

**Decorative Materials:** All materials used for decorative, acoustical or other effect (such as curtains, draperies, fabrics, streamers, and surface coverings) and all other materials utilized for decorative effect (such as batting, cloth, cotton, hay stalks, straw, vines, leaves, trees, moss and other similar items), including foam plastics and other materials containing foam plastics.

## PERMITS

1. A permit application shall be submitted a minimum of two (2) weeks prior to the event. Fire Prevention shall review the site and floor plans and perform Fire safety Inspections before permits are issued. (Contact the Fire Department for details).
2. Additional permits may be required (Contact the Fire Department for details).
3. An inspection shall be required and scheduled after all paperwork and approvals are received from the Building and Fire Departments, prior to final approval to operate.
4. Permit application packet shall include the following:
  - A. Dimensioned site plan showing the following:
    - The proximity of the event building to other structures or hazardous areas
    - The path of travel from the event building or area to the public way
    - The location of exterior evacuation assembly points
  - B. Floor plan showing the following:
    - Dimensions of the area being used (include total square footage, width and types of exits, aisles or interior exit pathways, etc.)
    - The path of travel shall include the layout of any mazes, mirrors or other display items that may confuse the egress paths
    - A brief description of what will be depicted in each room or area along the walk or course, including the type of special effects utilized
    - Locations of exits, exit signs, and emergency lighting
    - Locations of electrical panel(s) and light switches
    - Locations of portable fire extinguishers
    - Identification of what the normal or prior use of the structure(s) being used is(are) i.e. auditorium, school, church, etc.
    - Accessible egress routes
    - When required, areas of refuge
    - Locations of smoke detectors, manual fire alarm boxes, fire alarm panel, and/or horn and strobe locations
    - Location and fuel capacity of all generators
    - Staff positions while in operation
  - C. A written emergency procedure plan shall be provided with permit application packet. All employees shall be trained in emergency procedures. Emergency procedure shall include training of staff and familiarization with fire alarm tone (if applicable). Specific personnel shall be designated to turn off all distracting noises (i.e. sound system) and turn on lights when alerted by either fire alarm

system or otherwise notified of an emergency condition. All emergency staff shall carry flashlights and know the location of all exits, fire extinguishers, light switches, electrical panels, and emergency phones.

D. A fire drill may be required.

E. Phone communication shall be readily available for the purpose of calling 911 in the event of an emergency.

## **GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

### **1. Allowable Structures**

A. Haunted houses, ghost walks, and similar amusement uses shall only be located in structures that comply with the provisions for Special Amusement Buildings as listed in the **Fire Protection** section below.

### **2. Tents or Membrane Structures**

A. Tents or membrane structures may be used when in compliance with all applicable requirements as determined by the Fire Code Official and when the total floor area of the tent is less than 1,000 square feet and the travel distance to an exit from any location is less than 50 feet.

### **3. Fire Evacuation Plans**

A. Fire Safety and Evacuation plan(s) shall be submitted. Plans shall be approved by the Fire Code Official prior to first on-site inspection.

### **4. Staffing**

A. The event shall be adequately staffed by qualified person(s) to control the occupant load and assist patrons in exiting should an evacuation become necessary. Staffing level shall be determined upon plan review and may be increased at the discretion of the Fire Code Official.

### **5. Occupant Load**

A. Maximum occupant load (which shall include staff) shall be determined during plan review. A sign stating maximum occupancy shall be posted in a visible location near the entrance and staff shall control the flow of patrons so as not to exceed this limit.

## 6. Exits

- A. Exits shall be in accordance with the California Fire Code as determined by the Fire Code Official.
- Two exits shall be provided from each room with an occupant load of 50 or more. Required exit doors shall swing in the direction of egress.
  - Illuminated exit signs, with battery backup, shall be provided at each exit serving an occupant load of 50 or more. Non-illuminated exit signs shall be provided for all exits serving an occupant load less than 50.
  - Exit doors serving an occupant load of 50 or more shall not be provided with a latch or lock unless it is panic hardware.
  - When tents or membrane structures are approved for use, curtains shall not be allowed to cover the exits.
  - Emergency lighting, with battery backup, shall be provided in exit pathways.
  - Exhibits and decorative materials shall not obstruct, confuse or obscure exits, exit pathways, exit signs or emergency lights.
  - Additional pathway marking, including low-level marking and signs may be required at time of field inspection.

## 7. Fire Protection

- A. Haunted houses and ghost walks shall be provided with Fire Protection Systems in accordance with the California Fire Code as determined by the Fire Code Official.
- **Fire Sprinkler Protection:** An approved automatic sprinkler system shall be required for haunted houses and indoor portions of ghost walks as approved by the Fire Code Official. Where the special amusement building is temporary, the sprinkler water supply shall be of an approved temporary means.
    - **Exception:** Automatic sprinklers are not required where the total floor area of a temporary special amusement building is less than 1,000 square feet and the travel distance from any point to an exit is less than 50 feet.
  - **Fire Detection Systems:** An approved automatic fire detection system shall be provided in accordance with the California Fire Code as determined by the Fire Code Official.

- **Alarm:** Activation of any single smoke detector, the automatic fire sprinkler system or other automatic fire detection device that immediately sounds an audible and visible alarm and includes the capability of a manual initiation.
- **Emergency Voice Alarm:** An emergency voice/alarm communications system, which is also permitted to serve as a public address system provided the manual fire alarm use takes precedence over other uses, shall be installed and shall automatically send an audible alert tone throughout the entire special amusement building, followed by voice instructions giving approved information for a general or staged evacuation in accordance with the building's fire safety and evacuation plans.
- **Portable Fire Extinguishers:** Fire extinguishers shall have a minimum 2A-10B:C rating and shall properly be mounted (top of unit between 3 and 5 feet from floor), visible and accessible at all times. Clearly identify locations with signs or reflective tape. Fire Extinguishers shall be located within 50 feet of travel from anywhere in the building.
- **Exit Marking:** Exit marking shall be installed at the required exit or exit access doorways of amusement buildings. Where mirrors, mazes or other designs are utilized that disguise the path of egress travel such as they are not apparent, approved low-level exit signs and directional path markings shall be provided as determined by the Fire Code Official.
  - **Exception:** When the total floor area of haunted houses or indoor portions of ghost walks are less than 1,000 square feet and the travel distance from any point to an exit is less than 50 feet. Also, amusement buildings or portions thereof that are without walls or a roof and constructed to prevent the accumulation of smoke need not comply with the above section.

## 8. Electrical

- A. When required, a permit shall be obtained from the local building official.
  - **Extension Cords:** Extension cords shall be of heavy commercial type; UL listed, in good condition, and shall be appropriate for its intended use.
  - **Power Strips:** Only UL Listed power strips with over-current protection shall be used when the number of outlets provided is inadequate. Power strips shall be plugged directly into provided the outlet, and shall not be plugged into one another in series.

- **Protection:** All extension cords and power strips shall be adequately protected from foot traffic (“Bridged”) if paths of travel cannot be avoided.
- **Permit:** An electrical permit may be required. Contact your local building department for requirements.
- **Effect Lights:** Flood and strobe lights shall be plugged directly into a wall outlet, a listed multi-plug power strip, or a single listed extension cord.
- **String Lighting:** String lighting shall follow the manufacturer’s installation guidelines for the maximum number of string lights that can be connected. When connecting string lights together, the total amperage of all string lights shall be calculated to ensure they do not exceed the amperage of the extension cord and circuit.
- **Portable Generators:** When portable generators are utilized, they shall be diesel fuel type and located a minimum of 20 feet away from all structures.

## 9. Decorative Materials

A. Interior wall, ceiling, and floor finishes shall be Class A rated in accordance with the California Building code as determined by the Fire Code Official.

- **Flame Retardant:** All decorative materials (decorations, drapes, backdrops and props) shall be both inherently flame retardant and labeled as such, or shall be treated with a listed flame-retardant material. If the material is treated by the user, a container and receipt shall serve as proof.
- **Flame Test:** Any material not appropriately labeled as fire retardant by the State Fire Marshal and bearing the State Fire Marshal Seal, shall be flame tested as determined by the Fire Code Official. Proof of testing shall be provided.
- **Placement of Decorative Materials:** Decorative materials, props and/or performer platforms shall not obstruct, confuse, or obscure exits, exit signs, exit pathways, emergency lighting or any component of fire protection systems and equipment (i.e. fire extinguishers, fire alarm systems, fire sprinklers, etc.) inside or outside the building.
- **Approval:** All interior finishes shall be approved by the Fire Code Official.

**Note:** The flame test shall consist of putting a flame to a sample of the material by a match or lighter. The test shall be conducted outside the building on a specimen of the material approximately 3 inches wide by 10 inches long and oriented at a 45-degree

angle. When testing, the flame shall be applied at the bottom edge of the material for a period of up to 12 seconds. If the material fails to ignite, or if it ignites and self extinguishes when the flame source is removed, the material shall be considered flame retardant.

**Miscellaneous:**

- **Smoke Generators:** Use of smoke-generating equipment may be restricted if determined to be incompatible with smoke alarm(s). Care and consideration shall be used with respect to smoke generator and smoke alarm locations. Smoke generator and smoke alarm locations shall be approved by the Fire Code Official.
- **Display of Motor Vehicles:** Display of motor vehicles shall be in accordance with the California Fire Code as determined by the Fire Code Official.
- **Inspections:** A fire and life safety inspection shall be conducted by the Fire Department prior to the start of the event.
- **Signs:** “NO SMOKING” signs shall be conspicuously posted at the main entrance and throughout exhibit.
- **Prohibited Areas:** Inside storage or use of flammable and/or combustible liquids, gasses and solids shall be prohibited. Open flames are prohibited.
- **Maintenance:** Good housekeeping shall be maintained at all times throughout exhibit and exit pathways.