



BUILDING FIRES

Each year in the United States there are an estimated 368,500 residential building fires reported, resulting in over 2,000 deaths, 12,000 injuries, and \$8 billion in property loss ([FEMA's US Fire Administration](#)). There are steps a public housing agency can take to help prevent a building fire from occurring and to limit the amount of damage should one occur. For additional information on preventing building fires, visit [ready.gov/home-fires](https://www.ready.gov/home-fires).



Readiness

Building fires can cause loss of life and property. The following are best practices to mitigate risks:

Test smoke and carbon monoxide detectors regularly. Inspect fire alarms and sprinkler systems periodically to ensure they operate as intended.

Ensure adequate insurance coverage in line with [HUD 24 CFR 965](#) and [Notice PIH-2016-13](#). Some coverage plan considerations include guaranteed replacement cost, lost rental income, etc.

Educate residents about fire risks such as cooking, burning candles, removing batteries from smoke detectors, overloading extension cords and breakers, and placing combustibles or flammable material too close to heaters. You can find educational materials on the [US Fire Administration](#) and [National Fire Protection Association](#) websites.

Conduct safety drills with residents and staff regularly, and post evacuation information in units and high-visibility common areas. If possible, have uniformed firefighters conduct safety drills.

Involve the fire department in conducting periodic property risk assessments. Provide them with up-to-date lists of vulnerable residents such as people who are mobility impaired or use oxygen devices.

Identify community partners such as the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and others that can assist with the immediate food and shelter needs of displaced residents.

Maintain the property exterior to reduce fire hazards by clearing debris from the roof, gutters, and areas within 5 feet of the structure.

Inspect units and common areas regularly to identify potential fire risks and noncompliance with inspection standards and fire codes, such as blocked egress. Use a checklist to document deficiencies and corrective actions.

Refer residents with special needs and/or hoarding concerns to community service agencies for assistance. Make note of residents that may need additional assistance during a disaster (e.g., persons with disabilities).

Consider mitigation projects, such as installing:

- **tamper-proof smoke and carbon monoxide detectors** to avoid battery removal
- **hardwired smoke and carbon monoxide detectors**
- **sprinkler systems**, if feasible
- **stovetop fire suppressors** which emit a fire extinguisher-type material if a fire is sensed on the range
- **fire escape rope ladders** for low-rise units that do not have a fire escape
- **a standpipe system** that helps firefighters deploy hose lines quickly and with adequate water pressure

Inspection Protocol

It is a best practice to regularly monitor federal, state, and local fire codes for updates to ensure compliance. In addition, the following fire safety requirements are incorporated into HUD's inspection standards:

Smoke detectors must be in proper working condition and located on each level of the rental unit according to [Housing Quality Standards](#) for housing choice voucher (HCV) units and [Uniform Physical Condition Standards](#) for public housing units.

Carbon monoxide alarms or detectors must be installed in all public housing, HCV, and project-based voucher units by December 27, 2022, as required by HUD in [Notice PIH-2022-01](#).

Proposed HUD Requirements

The [National Standards for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate](#) (NSPIRE) are proposed inspection standards. NSPIRE standards would incorporate several requirements related to fire safety, including:

Smoke alarms must conform with the [National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code](#).

Carbon monoxide alarms must conform with the [2018 International Fire Code](#).

Fire-labeled doors and sprinklers, when present, must be fully functional.

Response

The following are best practices during and immediately after a building fire:

Call 9-1-1 immediately to get the fire department on site. Don't assume others have already called!

Connect with the incident commander of the fire department team for initial guidance. A fire watch crew may be needed for the first 24 hours or longer.

Ensure residents promptly evacuate the building. Guide them to a secure, predetermined location nearby where they are safe and out of the way of first responders.

Survey to account for the location of residents and staff who were in the building.

Assess business operations, resident status, and housing stock to identify immediate needs.

Contact community partners that can help meet the immediate food and shelter needs of displaced residents.

Communicate with residents regularly to keep them updated on current conditions. Designate a primary staff person to provide these communications and respond to inquiries.

Wait for fire marshall approval before reentering the property, damaged units, or common areas.

Secure the property by locking doors and windows of damaged units and turning off utilities.

Recovery

After the initial response to a building fire, attention will shift to longer-term recovery. Below are best practices to follow:

Report the incident to your insurance provider immediately. Obtain the claim number and adjuster contact information. An insurance investigation should begin as soon as the fire department allows.

Assess short-term needs for displaced residents; coordinate donations from the community and arrange for grief counseling as appropriate.

Identify long-term housing needs for residents that are unable to return to their units.

Communicate with residents regularly about the status of recovery and housing options.

Verify building systems work properly post-fire by working with elevator, sprinkler, and utility companies, as appropriate.

Conduct a post-fire assessment of damages, including a structural assessment.

Know your agency's policies for emergency procurement or otherwise expediting the hiring of restoration and remediation professionals.

Coordinate with your insurance company and a private adjuster, if necessary, to ensure maximum insurance proceeds. Insurance may cover the loss of rental income if included in your policy; however, you may need to request this type of coverage.