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PETER J. OSTROSKEY
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

MEMORANDUM

To: Heads of Fire Departments

From: Peter J. Ostroskey, State Fire Marshal

Date: August 15, 2019

Re: **School Fire Drills**

The information contained in the memorandum is a collaborative effort between the Department of Fire Services (DFS) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). As the beginning of a new school year approaches, many of your departments are engaging school superintendents and principals to provide assistance with Fire Drills, and various emergency plans. Therefore, this is a good opportunity to review the requirements of 527 CMR 1.00 [Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code, Section 363 of Chapter 159 of the Acts of 2000](#) requiring Multi-hazard Evacuation Plans, and Chapter 77 of the Acts of 2012 (Medical Emergency Law) requiring [Medical Emergency Response Plans \(MERP\)](#).

The *Fire Prevention in Schools* pamphlet that was shared in the August 2019 DFS Briefs, and attached to this memorandum, provides an excellent primer for the information you need to be familiar with as you collaborate with school leadership and other public safety officials. In addition to the information in the aforementioned pamphlet, please also include in your preparations, a review of the information contained in the fire code sections *10.5 Fire Drills*, and *10.8 Emergency Action Plans*. These two code sections set the stage for the information in section *20.2 Educational Occupancies*. The following are some of the major provisions contained in the referenced documents.

The responsible school official in charge of the school or the school system, shall formulate a plan for the protection and evacuation of all persons in the event of fire, and shall include

alternate means of egress for all persons involved. Such plan shall be presented to and approved by the Head of the Fire Department.

The responsible school official in charge of the school or the school system shall see that each class instructor or supervisor shall receive proper instructions on the fire drill procedures specified for the room or area in which that person carries out their duties before they assume such duties.

Additionally, the Head of the Fire Department, or their designee, shall visit each school at least four times each year (preferably 2 – 3 months apart) for the purpose of conducting fire drills. These drills should be coordinated with the person in charge of the school at the time, but without advance warning to other school personnel. Fire exit drills shall include the complete evacuation of all persons from the building.

A drill of the multi-hazard evacuation plan, required by St. 2000, c. 159, § 363, shall be permitted to be substituted for one of the fire drills required by 20.2.4.2.3.

It is required that every student, in all schools, be advised of the fire drill procedures, or take part in a fire drill within three days after entering school. Also, as often happens throughout the school year, students may move to a different school. DFS strongly recommends that students take part in a full exit drill within those first three days. However, given the considerations of weather and other factors that may hinder such a drill, some latitude is afforded to ensure students and staff are well advised of the procedure in that absence of a full exit drill.

A record of all fire exit drills shall be kept on the premises and persons in charge of such occupancies shall file written reports at least twice a year with the Head of the Fire Department providing the following information:

- (1) Time of drill;
- (2) Date of drill;
- (3) Weather conditions when occupants were evacuated;
- (4) Number of occupants evacuated;
- (5) Total time for evacuation;
- (6) Other information relevant to the drill.

In an effort to assist in meeting the documentation requirements for fire drills contained in 20.2.4.2.1.5, an additional attachment to this memorandum is a template containing the minimum required information about the drill and can be adopted locally and modified to incorporate additional information as desired for such record keeping purposes.

The information contained in this memorandum and the attachments will also be shared with Superintendents and school administrators in an upcoming DESE Commissioner's Weekly Update and shared on their website.

School Wall Decorations (Uses of Paper Materials)

527 CMR 1.00, s. 20.2.4.4.3

Regulates how, where and how much paper decorations may safely be displayed on walls in sprinklered and unsprinklered buildings.

When building new schools, consider this regulation and include bulletin board design to safely display paper materials.

Fire Lanes

527 CMR 1.00, c. 18

Regulations on designation, maintenance and preventing obstruction of fire lanes.

Keep clear at all times.

Fire Extinguishers

527 CMR 1.00, s. 13.6

Emergency Wash Stations

527 CMR 1.00, s. 10.24

Says where, how many and what kind of fire extinguishers and emergency wash stations schools need.

Has testing and inspection requirements.

Labs are required to have emergency wash systems (showers) or fire blankets and signage.

Fire Protection Systems

527 CMR 1.00, c. 13

Requires schools to inspect, test and maintain fire alarm, fire sprinkler and kitchen suppression systems.

Chemistry Labs

527 CMR 1.00, c. 26

Permits and special storage arrangements may be required based on the type and quantity of chemicals stored.

Don't store chemicals alphabetically.

Think about the life cycle and hazardous waste disposal when purchasing and storing chemicals.

See 527 CMR 1.00, s. 10.24 for emergency wash stations, fire blankets and signage.

School Fire Reporting Law

M.G.L. c. 148, s. 2A

Requires schools to report all fires to the local fire department.

Requires fire departments to report all school fires to the Mass. Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS).

No Smoking in Schools

Federal Law; M.G.L. c. 270, s. 22

Fire and Life Safety Education

M.G.L. c. 71, s. 1

DESE Health Curriculum Frameworks

The Student Awareness of Fire Education (S.A.F.E.) program has trained firefighter-educators who work with classroom teachers.

Fire Prevention in Schools



A school is one of the most important resources in a community. School fires destroy costly bricks and mortar, and also the heart of a community.

This pamphlet summarizes fire prevention regulations affecting schools. It also explains where to find more detailed information about regulations.

Fire prevention laws can be found in M.G.L. Chapter 148. Most fire prevention regulations affecting schools can be found in 527 Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR) 1.00. The Department of Fire Services' website has these and many helpful Fire Safety Division Advisories. Visit www.mass.gov/dfs and search for *FSD Advisories*.

School Fire Drills

527 CMR 1.00, s. 20.2.4.2.1.4

Fire departments are required to conduct fire drills in schools four times a year. Within three days of the start, students must be familiarized with the exit plan or participate in a drill.

Multi-Hazard & MERP Plans

Section 363 of Chapter 159 of the Acts of 2000, M.G.L. c. 69, s. 8A

School superintendents are required to meet with the local police and fire chiefs to develop a multi-hazard evacuation plan and in addition must have developed a Medical Emergency Response Plan (MERP) by fall 2012, and resubmit every 3 years.

DFS has a *School Bomb Threat Response Guide* pamphlet to help with all hazard planning.

Place of Assembly (Theatres, Auditorium, Gym, Cafeteria)

527 CMR 1.00, s. 20.1.5.10.3.1

Schools need a certificate of inspection from the building official which will set the occupancy limit.

Severe penalties for violating occupancy limits and blocked egress, passed in the aftermath of the fire at The Station nightclub.

See *School Wall Decoration* regulations for proms, dances, etc.

See regulations on drapery and curtains.

Crowd Manager Requirements

527 CMR 1.00, s. 20.1.5.6

A crowd manager is needed in facilities that feature entertainment by live band or recorded music generating above normal sound levels and which have a specific area designated for dancing. Schools might need a trained crowd manager on-duty when holding school dances. To be sure, discuss this with your local fire department early in the school year. For more information on crowd manager requirements or to take the online training program, please go to www.mass.gov/dfs.

Upholstered Furniture, Molded Chairs and Re-Upholstered Furniture

527 CMR 1.00, s. 12.6.3

Requirements are different for sprinklered and unsprinklered buildings.

Flammability testing requirements for furniture.

Furniture should be resistant to fire. It can produce volumes of toxic smoke.

Decorations, Curtains, Draperies and Window Treatments

527 CMR 1.00, s. 12.6.2

Requires certification that these products meet flammability standards.

Theatrical Special Effects

527 CMR 1.00, c. 65

OSFM Advisory 1/5/2007 & 8/1/2014

Schools need a permit from the local fire department to use special effects and pyrotechnics (including flash powder and flash paper).

Special effects and pyrotechnics must be conducted by licensed individuals. Failure to do so constitutes a violation of M.G.L. c. 148, s. 34A with a \$5,000 fine and/or 2 1/2 years in prison. The law was passed in the aftermath of the Station nightclub fire.

General Housekeeping

Store cleaning chemicals in a safe and secure area (not next to heat sources.)

Shut off the appliances in the teacher/staff lounge each day.

Teach kitchen fire safety to cafeteria staff and include them in fire drills. Kitchen fires are one of the leading causes of fires in schools.

Do not wedge fire doors open (527 CMR 1.00, s. 12.4.6.18.3).

Record of Emergency Egress Drill (Fire Drill)
527 CMR 1.00 Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code

Name of School: _____

Type of Drill: (Circle one)	Fire Drill 527 CMR 1.00:20.2.4.2.1.4	Multi Hazard Drill St. 2000, c.159, s. 363
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Time of Drill: Start: _____ End: _____
20.2.4.2.1.5 (1)

Date of Drill: _____
20.2.4.2.1.5 (2)

Weather conditions when occupants were evacuated: _____
20.2.4.2.1.5 (3)

Number of occupants evacuated: _____
20.2.4.2.1.5 (4)

Total time for evacuation: _____ (minutes: seconds)
20.2.4.2.1.5 (5)

Other information relevant to the drill:
20.2.4.2.1.5 (6)

Were all fire alarms sounded: Yes _____ No _____
20.2.4.2.4

The evacuation proceeded in a smooth and orderly manner: Yes _____ No _____
10.5.3

Comments: _____
(Attach addition sheet(s) if necessary)

Did the drill contain varied conditions to simulate unusual conditions: Yes _____ No _____
10.5.4

Any other information relevant to the drill: _____
(Attach addition sheet(s) if necessary)

Drill conducted by: _____
Print Name

Signature

527 CMR 1.00:20.2.4.2.1.5 Records. A record of all fire exit drills shall be kept on the premises and persons in charge of such occupancies shall file written reports at least twice a year with the head of the fire department with the information contained on this form.