



CAL FIRE - Office of the State Fire Marshal Information Bulletin 20-003

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COVID-19 Emergency Medical Tents

This is to provide guidance and alternate means for hospitals, health care facilities, and local health departments on CAL FIRE – Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) regulatory requirements for flame-retardant tents during the COVID-19 emergency.

The guidance below is intended to expedite approval of operation of surge tents. Health care facilities and local government are encouraged to preplan for establishing surge tents so that when needed, the tents can be rapidly erected and operated.

Three entities are required to approve surge tents:

- OSFM provides statewide rules for prevention of fire in connection with the use of tents, awnings or other fabric enclosures. Included in these standards is the requirement that all tents be made of material approved by the State Fire Marshal.
- Local fire departments, or OSFM on state property, have responsibility to inspect the location and configuration of tents.
- The Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSPHD) has responsibility to protect the hospital building from adjacent hazards and exposures, including tents.

CAL FIRE – Office of the State Fire Marshal

Health and Safety Code Section 13116 requires the State Fire Marshal to prepare and adopt rules and regulations establishing minimum requirements for the prevention of fire and panic in connection with the use of tents, awnings or other fabric enclosures. The State Fire Marshal has done so in the California Building Code (CBC), California Fire Code (CFC) and Title 19 California Code of Regulations (CCR).

Section 332, Title 19 CCR requires all tents manufactured for sale, sold, rented, offered for sale or used in California to be made from nonflammable material or material approved by the State Fire Marshal.

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Section 335, Title 19 CCR requires each section of the top and sidewalls of large tents (ten or more occupants) to have the State Fire Marshal seal of registration label meeting the provisions of California Title 19 1237.1. Small tents (nine or less occupants) Shall have the State Fire Marshal seal of registration label meeting the provisions of CPAI-84. When approving the permit for use of the tent, local fire authorities will be looking for these labels as well as considering other fire and life safety and building code issues.

Given the critical/urgent nature of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the Office of the State Fire Marshal is providing the following:

- Expedited certification of tents
- Permitting tent and/or fabric manufacturers to field label tents after contacting the Office of the State Fire Marshal
- Permitting tents to be field treated by a State Fire Marshal certified flame-retardant General Applicator.

Local Fire and Life Safety Compliance Options

- Accepting the manufacturer's copy of the State Fire Marshal's Certificate of Registration and approving the tent.
- Perform a flammability test as outlined in NFPA 705 (field test) on the tent prior to approving the tent.
- Require alternate means of protection in lieu of that required by regulation if in the authority's opinion, reasonable and adequate protection can be afforded.
- Deny the use of the tent.

For assistance in obtaining an approved OSFM Certificate of Registration, please contact Deputy Patricia Setter, OSFM Flame Retardant Program Coordinator at (916) 597-5703 or email: patricia.setter@fire.ca.gov.

Local Fire Department or State Owned Facilities

When the local fire department or State regulated department reviews the proposed location for the tent, it will consider many factors. It is always advisable to meet with the fire department well in advance of the time when tents may need to be erected. Accurate site plans are always helpful and in some cases required to be submitted to the local fire department or the State for review and approval prior to erection of the tent.

Different jurisdictions have different requirements relating to the use of temporary structures. It is recommended to check with local fire departments prior to erecting any tents to ensure compliance with local ordinances or inspection requirements.

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Some of the concerns the fire department will be watching for include the following:

- Fire apparatus access roads shall be provided to all sides of the tent in accordance with Section 503 of the Fire Code Fire Apparatus Access Road.
- Tents may not be located within 20 feet of lot lines, buildings, other tents, canopies or membrane structures. For determining required distances, support ropes and guy wires shall be considered as part of the tent.
- Parking of Vehicles. Vehicles necessary to the operation of the establishment, shall be parked at least 20 feet from any tent. No other vehicle shall be parked less than 100 feet from any tent except vehicles parked on a public street shall park at least 20 feet from any tent.
- An unobstructed fire break passageway or fire road not less than 20 feet wide and free from guy ropes or other obstructions shall be maintained on all sides of all tents, canopies and membrane structures unless otherwise approved by the fire department.
- Tents and their appurtenances shall be adequately roped, braced and anchored to withstand the elements of weather and prevent against collapsing. Documentation of structural stability shall be furnished to the fire department on request.
- Smooth-surfaced, unobstructed aisles having a minimum width of not less than 44 inches shall be provided from exits to all portions of the interior of the tent. The arrangement of aisles shall be subject to approval by the fire department and shall be maintained clear at all times during occupancy.
- Exits shall be clearly marked. Exit signs shall be installed at required exit doorways and where otherwise necessary to indicate clearly the direction of egress when the exit serves an occupant load of 50 or more. Exit signs shall be of an approved illuminated type and shall be provided with an internal back-up battery capable of illuminating the sign for a minimum of 90 minutes after power has failed.
- The means of egress shall be illuminated with light having an intensity of not less than 1 foot-candle at floor level while the structure is occupied. Fixtures required for means of egress illumination shall be supplied from a separate emergency power circuit or from an internal battery.
- The areas within and adjacent to the tent shall be maintained clear of all combustible materials or vegetation that could create a fire hazard within 50 feet of the structure. Combustible trash shall be removed at least once a day from the tent during the period the structure is occupied.

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- Smoking shall not be permitted in tents. Approved “No Smoking” signs shall be conspicuously posted.
- Open flame or other devices emitting flame, fire or heat or any flammable or combustible liquids, gas, charcoal or other cooking device or any other unapproved devices shall not be permitted inside or located within 20 feet of the tent, canopy or membrane structures while open to the public unless approved by the fire code official.
- Flammable and Combustible Liquids. Liquids having a flash point below 200°F shall not be stored in any tent nor less than 50 feet from any tent. Flammable or combustible liquids shall be stored and dispensed in accordance with the provisions of the California Fire Code.
- Portable fire extinguishers shall be provided as required by Section 567, Title 19 CCR and the fire department.
- Heating equipment, tanks, piping, hoses, fittings, valves, tubing and other related components shall be installed as specified in the California Mechanical Code and shall be approved by the fire department. Gas, liquid and solid fuel-burning equipment designed to be vented shall be vented to the outside air as specified in the California Mechanical Code. Such vents shall be equipped with approved spark arresters when required. Where vents or flues are used, all portions of the tent, canopy or membrane structure shall be not less than 12 inches from the flue or vent. Heating equipment shall not be located within 10 feet of exits or combustible materials. Electrical heating equipment shall comply with the California Electrical Code.
- LP-gas equipment such as tanks, piping, hoses, fittings, valves, tubing and other related components shall be approved and in accordance with Chapter 61 of the Fire Code and the California Mechanical Code. LP-gas containers shall be located outside and safety release valves shall be pointed away from the tent. Portable LP-gas containers with a capacity of 500 gallons or less shall have a minimum separation between the container and structure not less than 10 feet. Portable LP-gas containers, piping, valves and fittings which are located outside and are being used to fuel equipment inside a tent shall be adequately protected to prevent tampering, damage by vehicles or other hazards and shall be located in an approved location. Portable LP-gas containers shall be securely fastened in place to prevent unauthorized movement.
- Generators and other internal combustion power sources shall be separated from tents, canopies or membrane structures by a minimum of 20 feet and shall be isolated from contact with the public by fencing, enclosure or other approved means.