

# The Commercial Inspector

A Monthly Newsletter From National Property Inspections

VOLUME 15 ISSUE 10

## ask the inspector

**Q. What fire safety items will an inspector observe and report on in a commercial building?**

A. The design of fire suppression systems in commercial buildings is determined by how the building will be used and how it is zoned by the [National Fire Protection Association](#) (NFPA) and local authority. Although a commercial building inspector is trained to observe and document these systems, the final authority is usually the local fire marshal or other authority having jurisdiction (AHJ).

The commercial building inspector will identify and observe life safety and fire protection systems on the property. The following is a list of the more common items an inspector will document during an inspection:



- » Determine whether a fire sprinkler system is present.
- » Note the presence of a fire hydrant on or near the property.
- » Establish the presence of a fire alarm system and the location of its

## snapshots from the field

### What Is This Photo?

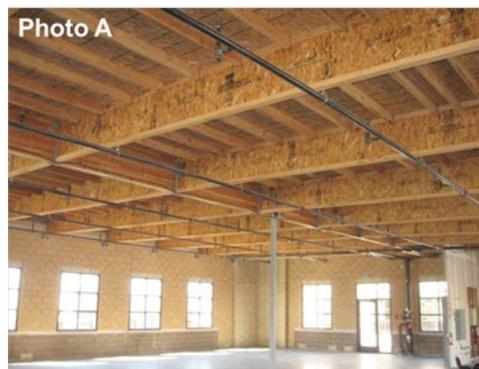


Photo A shows the typical piping of a commercial building sprinkler system near the roof line of the building. Photo B shows the protection system valve, which is commonly found at the exterior of a building with a fire suppression system installed.

main control panel.

- » Verify the presence and location of smoke detectors, emergency exit lights and emergency lighting.
- » Determine whether a water storage tank is on the property.
- » Establish the locations of fire extinguishers and the dates on the tags.
- » Check for self-closing doors, which create stairwell pressurization for a safer escape route during a fire.
- » Ascertain the presence of a smoke evacuation system, ductwork and fan system.
- » Document the monitoring system provider and the dates of the most recent system test if readily available.

## maintenance matters

### Is Your Building Prepared if a Fire Breaks Out?

To ensure that proper fire procedures can be followed in your commercial building, it is important that all existing fire equipment is properly maintained. Fire marshals usually follow guidelines to ensure the safety and proper operation of fire equipment and procedures. Some fire departments will inspect individual businesses annually and follow up with recommendations or any applicable violations that must be corrected.

>>> *Story Continued on Next Page*

>>> *Story Continued From First Page*

We've gathered the following list of simple and general maintenance items for fire equipment inside a commercial building:



- » **Fire extinguishers:** Check that extinguishers are available inside the building and that they are not expired. Extinguishers are tagged with information regarding inspection and expiration dates. If no information is available or the tag is missing, then it's a good practice to replace the extinguisher.
- » **Smoke alarms:** Test smoke alarms in the building monthly to ensure that they are working properly. Annually, replace batteries in smoke detectors — it's inexpensive and good maintenance.
- » **Exit signs:** Make sure exit signs are visible, working properly and illuminated. Different types of signs are available, and specific types may be required based on fire codes in your area.

- » **Exit routes:** Exit routes and exit-route maps should be displayed to help building occupants determine how to exit the building in the event of a fire.
- » **Stairways:** Make sure stairways are clearly marked, as elevators should be avoided in certain building evacuation situations, such as fire.

Becoming informed about your local fire codes and rules will help ensure that safety procedures are followed correctly in your commercial building.

## for your information

### Workplace Fire Safety Procedures

If a fire erupts in the workplace, the result could be devastating if proper safety procedures are not followed. Workplace fires can become more chaotic simply because there are usually more people inside the building, and that can lead to increased panic. To prevent some of the chaos during a workplace fire, commercial building owners and business owners should have procedures in place:

- » **Clearly posted fire prohibitions.** Items such as "No Smoking" signs and signage warning of flammable materials should be clearly marked.

- » **Educate employees.** Employers may provide classroom training or a training manual or document, although classroom may be more effective.
- » **Exit the building.** In the event of a fire or a fire alarm, building occupants should exit the building immediately.
- » **Contact emergency services.** Ensure that emergency 911 services have been notified.
- » **Do a head count.** After the building is evacuated, someone should be in charge of conducting a head count. Other employees will know if someone is missing. In such a case, alert emergency workers to the employee's last known whereabouts.
- » **Follow up appropriately.** After exiting the building, do not re-enter unless the proper authorities have given clearance for re-entry.



In addition to the above, an employer or building owner may recruit volunteers among the building's occupants to assist as supervisors in the event of a fire.