

Seattle Fire Prevention Division

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Tents and Heaters During the Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Recovery: Safety Guidelines and Permit Options from Seattle Fire Department

Tents can be dangerous if they catch fire or collapse. For this reason, larger tents are regulated by the Fire and Building Codes. Heaters can also pose risks, whether the heat is provided by propane/Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), diesel, or electricity. This document presents a summary of code requirements as well as special streamlined permitting and rules in effect during the COVID pandemic and recovery.

TENTS

The Seattle Fire Department (SFD) is issuing a free temporary tent permit (permit code 3201-CV) to businesses and organizations that are moving services outdoors due to government restrictions on occupant loads, or providing outdoor services that support economic recovery and revitalization after the COVID pandemic as part of the City's Safe Start initiative.

You need a Seattle Fire Department (SFD) permit for using a temporary tent, canopy, or air-supported structure if:

- The structure is bigger than 400 square feet and has one or more walls; OR,
- The structure is bigger than 700 square feet with no walls (roof-only canopies).
- You have two or more small roof-only tents that are placed side by side less than 12 feet apart and their total area is bigger than 700 square feet.

The no-fee permit includes conditions you must follow regarding tent materials and installation to comply with safety requirements in the fire code. The permit is good for 28 days. If your tent will be used for longer than 28 days, after receiving your no-fee SFD temporary tent permit, you can contact the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections at 206-684-8850 for optional permitting or administrative review to receive code compliance assurance. This step is optional during the period of emergency operations in Seattle. Awnings also require permits from SDCI and are not handled by SFD.

Even after the SFD temporary permit has expired (28 days) you will still be required to meet fire code conditions if your tent remains in use.

If you are renting your tent from a tent company, please notify the company if you are eligible for the no-fee permit and check the invoice to ensure they are not inadvertently charging you for any SFD permit fee. Eligibility criteria: you are moving some of your business or service outdoors due to public health limits on indoor use. If you were previously issued a temporary tent or LPG permit and are eligible for the no-fee permit, we will refund you the payment in full, please contact us at permits@seattle.gov.

Make Sure Your Tent Can Be Approved by the Fire Marshal If you are purchasing a tent greater than 400 sq feet, please ensure that it meets flame retardant standards in the fire code (see permit condition #8 on the last page). You will be required to accept responsibility and liability for the proper installation of the tent per industry standards and/or manufacturer's installation instructions. Temporary tents should not be occupied during periods of snow or ice accumulation unless designed for full structural loading per the Seattle Building Code. Smaller tents should be removed during snow and ice accumulation and wind events. Tents rented through a reputable tent rental company will meet fire code standards and the tent company will assume liability for proper installation.

Should I Choose a Tent Without Walls? For ventilation reasons, during the pandemic, government restrictions sometimes required zero, one, two or more walls. You may wish to take this into consideration when purchasing or renting a tent, as it is unknown whether future variants will cause a return to these restrictions.

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In addition, there are also fire code impacts of choosing a tent with or without walls: If your tent has no walls, you only need an SFD permit if your tent is larger than 700 square feet, or you have tents side by side closer than 12 feet apart with total area exceeding 700 square feet. However, if you add walls to your tent, then smaller tents will require an SFD permit, too. If your tent has any walls, a permit is required for tents 400 square feet or greater.

How Close to a Building Can a Tent be Installed? For example, Tents Covering Sidewalk Dining Tables SFD generally requires a set-back between tents and buildings of a minimum of 10 feet, primarily to allow access for emergency medical vehicles. However, during the COVID emergency, SFD will issue permits that allow tents to abut buildings with zero feet of clearance.

What are the Full Permit Conditions for a Temporary Tent? Please see the last page.

OUTDOOR HEATING AND LIGHTING

Propane (LPG) and Diesel-Fueled Heaters Require a Permit and Fuel Tanks are Not Allowed Inside Tents. This means “mushroom” heaters are allowed 10 feet away from tents, but are prohibited inside tents. “Salamander” style heaters which blow air in under a tent from the outside are permitted and are usually available from tent rental companies. The fuel tank must be a minimum 10 feet away from the tent and exits and you must have 3A 40BC fire extinguishers.

If you rent an LPG/propane or diesel heater from a tent rental company, that company will usually have the required SFD propane/diesel heater permit, and you will not need an additional permit. They should also provide required fire extinguishers. If you are purchasing your own LPG/propane or diesel heaters, you will need an SFD permit.

SFD is issuing free temporary Propane/LPG heating permits (permit code 8207-CV) and diesel permits (permit code 1102-CV) to businesses and organizations that are moving services outside due to public health rules limiting indoor use. A typical example would be outdoor dining or school classrooms. The no-fee permit includes conditions you must follow regarding safely locating, storing, and using the propane or diesel. The permit is valid for 12 months or until January 31, 2023, whichever comes first. If you are applying for a heater permit that is not associated with a tent, you will also be asked to provide a sketch or diagram of the proposed location showing exits, awnings, and tables where the heater will be deployed. If you were previously issued a temporary tent, propane/LPG or diesel permit and are eligible for the no-fee permit, we will refund you the payment in full, please contact us at permits@seattle.gov.

Electric Heaters and Lighting are allowed outside as well as inside tents and do not require a separate permit from SFD. However, there are some precautions you must take when using extension cords. Electrical cords must be protected from wear and damage and to avoid trip hazards. If you are using an extension cord with your heater, due to the amount of power the heater uses, you must ensure that the cord is a minimum of 12 gauge (or greater if recommended by the manufacturer). Extension cords should not be connected into each other and should never pass through holes in walls. Any significant electrical outlet must remain covered. This applies to junction boxes, circuit breaker panels, and any type of outlet box.

For more information, please contact the SFD Permits Unit at permits@seattle.gov. Interpretation services are available. Please feel free to request a call with someone who speaks your language – just tell us which language and your phone number.

Please see the following page for the full SFD permit conditions for temporary tents.

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PERMIT CONDITIONS: SFD TEMPORARY TENT PERMITS

Note: These conditions are for temporary tent permits issued during COVID emergency operations and are subject to change once COVID emergency operations are no longer in effect.

1. Minimum number and width of exits/egress ways shall be as listed on the chart below. Maximum travel distance to an exit shall be 100 ft. when inside the tent. ('18 SFC Section 3103.12)

Occupant Load	Minimum # of exits	Minimum width of each exit
10 to 199	2	72
200 to 499	3	72
500 to 999	4	96
1,000 to 1,999	5	120
2,000 to 2,999	6	120
Over 3,000	7	120

2. Each exit shall be provided with a lighted 'EXIT' sign with letters at least 5 inches in height. ('18 SFC Section 3103.12.6).
3. Provide one fire extinguisher rated a minimum of 2A for each 2,000 square feet of tent area. The location of each extinguisher shall be marked by signs, which are clearly visible. The maximum travel distance to any fire extinguisher within the tent shall be 50 ft. ('18 SFC Section 3107.9)
4. Any vehicles in the tent shall have their fuel tanks emptied and the battery cables disconnected. ('18 SFC Section 3107.15)
5. Post "NO SMOKING" signs, which are readily visible throughout the tent/canopy, and enforce this policy. ('18 SFC Section 3107.3)
6. The grounds, both inside and outside, shall be kept free and clear of combustible waste. Any waste shall be removed and stored in an approved manner. ('18 SFC Sections 3107.18 & 3107.19)
7. There shall be no open flame devices or demonstrations allowed in the tent without prior approval by the Fire Prevention Division. ('18 SFC Section 3107.4)
8. The sidewalls drop and top of the tent shall be of flame retardant material. ('18 SFC Section 3104.2)
9. Any unforeseen conditions that would present a fire hazard, or would contribute to rapid spread of a fire, or would delay or interfere with a rapid exit from the tent, which are not covered by this permit, shall be immediately abated or corrected. ('18 SFC Section 105.3)
10. Only electric powered heating devices are allowed inside the tent. All other heating devices (e.g. propane, diesel and kerosene fueled) must be outside the tent and require a separate permit issued by the Seattle Fire Department. ('18 SFC Sections 3107.4, 3107.12, 3107.13, 3107.14, 105.3 & 105.6)
11. Electric heaters and other electric appliances shall be listed and approved by UL, FM or other approved testing agencies. ('18 SFC Section 604.7) Cords for electric heaters must be a minimum of 12 gauge (or greater if the manufacturer recommends it). Cords shall not be "piggybacked" or connected together to make a longer cord.
12. Wiring shall be clearly marked to avoid becoming a tripping hazard ('18 SFC Section 105.3)
13. To be valid, this permit and attachments must be posted near the occupancy/activities. ('18 SFC Section 105.3.5)
14. Loose seats, folding chairs or similar seating, greater in number than 200, shall be bonded together in-groups of three or more. ('18 SFC Section 1029.15)
15. A document hereafter referred to as a "Letter of Structural Stability (LOSS)" shall be provided upon application for this permit ('18 SFC Section 3103.6 and 3103.9)
16. Temporary tents shall not be occupied during periods of snow or ice accumulation unless designed for full structural loading per the Seattle Building Code. ('18 SFC Section 105.3)

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