



# Event Fire and Life Safety Guidelines

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## Introduction

This guide helps you create a safe environment for events and ensure compliance with fire safety standards and regulatory requirements.

## Scope

These guidelines apply to both individuals and representatives of organizations sponsoring events that take place inside Harvard buildings or in places of assembly on campus.

Whenever you’re planning an event with a gathering of one hundred or more people inside a Harvard property that’s being used as a venue for a different purpose than its primary function, either the individual sponsor or a representative of the sponsoring organization must both:

- Review these guidelines before the event.
- Assure compliance with these guidelines before, during, and after the event.

## Regulatory Compliance

This guide defines policies and procedures to help you ensure compliance with applicable codes and regulations, including:



- Massachusetts Amendments to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) ®1, 2021 (effective February 3, 2023), 527 CMR 1.00: Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code.
- NFPA 101, Life Safety Code.
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts State Building Code, 9th Edition, 780 CMR.
- Massachusetts Board of Fire Prevention regulations.
- Applicable fire and life safety codes and local city regulations for events held in Harvard buildings.
- Harvard fire and life safety guidelines.

In Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Amendments to NFPA ®1 and NFPA 101, Life Safety Code serve as a primary reference for life safety issues. Throughout this guide, they are referred to as “code.”

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Authority Having Jurisdiction

The Authority Having Jurisdiction is the State Fire Marshal and the Chief of the local Fire Department where the event is taking place.

### EH&S

EH&S, in conjunction with the various schools, is responsible for enforcing Harvard policy and guidelines.

EH&S is responsible for fire safety, including:

- Providing fire safety program implementation training.
- Annually reviewing policies and updating them as needed.
- Annually reviewing capacities for all assembly areas.
- Reviewing crowd management requirements for significant Harvard events upon request.



## Event Sponsors

Groups that sponsor events in Harvard buildings must appoint a [responsible person](#) whenever attendance at the event exceeds one hundred people.

Depending on the scope of the event, groups may also need to appoint a trained crowd manager.

## Facilities

- Assure that tables and chairs are set up following fire code specifications.
- Be responsible for maintaining life safety equipment, including emergency lighting, exit signs, doors, and emergency hardware.
- Retain documentation of the Fire and Building Safety Checklist as required by code, NFPA <sup>®</sup>1, Section 20.1.5.6.4.

## Responsible Person

- Complete the [Fire and Building Safety Checklist](#).
- Comply with all applicable requirements in the Fire and Building Safety Checklist.
- Using the Fire and Building Safety Checklist, perform an inspection of the space before the event begins.
- Attend and be present throughout the duration of the event to assure compliance with all specified guidelines and procedures.
- If food warming is necessary, ensure that the event follows [Sterno gel food warming precautions](#).
- After the event is over, complete and sign the Fire and Building Safety Checklist to verify that all appropriate fire safety guidelines were accomplished. Send a copy of the completed checklist to your school's respective event coordinators or department.



## Planning Safe Events

### Before the Event

#### Appoint a Responsible Person

Designate a person from your organization who will fulfill all [responsible person responsibilities](#).

#### Appoint a Crowd Manager

Designate a trained crowd managers who will be responsible for:

- Monitoring the event once it's open to the public.
- Being present for the entire duration of the event.

#### Understand Means of Egress

A “means of egress” is a continuous and unobstructed path that lets people travel from any point within a building or structure to a public space.

It consists of three separate and distinct parts:

- Exit way access.
- Exit way.
- Exit way discharge.

This path includes both the vertical and horizontal means of travel. It also includes intervening room spaces, doors, hallways, corridors, passageways, balconies, ramps, stairs, enclosures, lobbies, escalators, horizontal exits, courts, and yards.

This guide uses the terms “means of egress” and “exit” interchangeably.



## Determine Assembly Occupancy Capacity

Before reserving an event space:

1. Determine if the space is an [assembly occupancy](#).
2. For assembly occupancies, determine the [occupancy load capacity](#) of the space you plan to reserve for your event.
3. Ensure the space is large enough to accommodate the number of people you expect to attend the event.<sup>1</sup>

Don't exceed the posted occupancy load capacity based on the use and configuration of the space. Using elements like chairs, tables, bars, or stages reduces the space's capacity.

### Assembly Occupancy

Assembly occupancy is defined as a space that is either:

- Used for a gathering of 50 or more people for activities such as deliberation, worship, entertainment, eating, drinking, amusement, or awaiting transportation.
- Used as a special amusement building, regardless of occupant load.

Assembly occupancies can include spaces like assembly halls, auditoriums, club rooms, dance halls, drinking establishments, and exhibition halls.

### Occupancy Load Capacity

The building's legal capacity specified on its Certificate of Inspection issued under the State Building Code determines the occupancy load, not the actual number of people present in the building at any given time. The occupancy load includes the total number of employees, performers, and patrons.

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<sup>1</sup> "Occupancy" means the use of space or rooms within a building by a person or group of people.



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The city building inspector department calculates occupancy load capacities. These capacities are subject to change based on inspections conducted by the local fire department, under provisions of the Massachusetts State Building Code, 9th Edition.

Every assembly occupancy room or space must display its occupancy load in a conspicuous place, typically near the main exit or exit access doorway. These posted signs must be of an approved legible permanent design and maintained by the owner or authorized agent.

<b>Occupancy Load Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Net floor area allowances per occupant	Calculated based on an observation of the room configured for normal use. Usually, the net floor area is the total floor area of the empty room. If the room has a stage, a display case, a bar, a large table or chair, or any other permanent or semi-permanent fixture, subtract the space occupied by the obstruction from the total area of the room to calculate the net floor area.
Concentrated use capacity	Based on the number of people standing in a room (5 net square feet or net area per occupant) or people with chairs only (7 net square feet of net area per occupant).
Unconcentrated use capacity	Assumes people are seated at tables, reducing capacity to 15 net square feet.
Fixed seating	Seats permanently affixed to the floor, like seats or bleachers in auditoriums or gymnasiums.
Non-fixed seating	Chairs that can be easily removed from the room, including folding chairs and table chairs in classrooms.

For more information about occupancy load, review 780 CMR Chapter 10, 9th Edition.



## Choose Safe Decorations, Wall Coverings, and Sound Insulation

Ensure all decorations, wall coverings, and sound insulation are flame resistant as specified in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code 527 CMR 1, NFPA 1 Section 12.6 and Section 20.1.5.4.

Ensure that decorations don't obstruct exits, access to exits, egress from exits, or visibility of exits. Don't place decorations over exit doors or in any way that conceals or obscures an exit.

Certain materials regulated under 527 CMR, NFPA 1 Section 20.1.5.4 may require destructive testing. Before using these decorative materials, you must submit a permit application several weeks before the event.

The testing and permit information must specify:

- The certified flame-retardant material.
- The certifying agency.
- Certification number.
- The specific occupancy type for which the permit is issued.

If you have questions about the flammability of any materials you plan to use, contact EH&S.

## Request a Fire Detail

You must arrange for a paid fire fighter detail as required by the local city or town if your event meets either of these criteria:

- Events in assembly occupancies where candles will be used.
- Other situations where the Fire Marshal deems it necessary for life safety.

## Request a Police Detail

Typically, events held in Harvard spaces need a [Harvard University Police Department \(HUPD\) detail](#) if there are one hundred people or more in attendance and alcohol is being served.





Many other events still require police details. Event organizers should contact the HUPD to ask if they need a police detail.

## Review Candle, Open Flames, and Pyrotechnic Device Policies

Nobody is allowed to use open flames, candles, or pyrotechnical devices inside any Harvard building.

You can use flameless, battery-operated, real wax candles at events. These candles run for 350 hours on two “C” size batteries and have an LED bulb inside replicating the warm glow and random flicker of real candlelight.

To request candles for religious ceremonies, consult with your advisor or building manager.

## Arrange Tables, Chairs, and Aisles

In each place of assembly where seating is provided (except for those where people are seated at tables):

- Arrange seating in an orderly manner.
- Amply provide for aisles leading to exits.
- Don’t obstruct or encumber any aisle forming a part of the egress system of the place of assembly.

If you arrange tables for dining or other purposes in places of assembly, position them and space them apart in a way that allows for enough access to exit openings. Ensure aisles leading towards exits are at least 3 feet wide. Provide suitable access from all tables to aisles.

For more information, review NFPA 101, Life Safety Code.

## Implement Sterno Gel Food Warming Precautions

You can use Sterno type gel fuel to warm food at approved events if you follow Sterno Solid Alcohol Fuel Safe Use Guidelines.

When working with Sterno gel fuel:



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1. Handle open flame products with caution.
2. When opening Sterno cans, use a blunt object like a spoon to remove the lid. Don't use a sharp knife to pry off the lid. Cup your hand over the lid when opening the can.
3. If you're using the lid as a regulator, remove any excess gel from the lid.
4. Wash your hands to remove any fuel residue.
5. Place the can underneath the chafing dish or beverage urn before lighting it. Make sure the can is placed securely in the equipment.
6. Use a long-handled match or a butane lighter to light the can. Never use a lit can to light another one.
7. While in use, don't carry lit cans or carry chafing dishes or beverage urns with lit cans. Keep loose clothing, napkins, or tablecloths away from flames.
8. To extinguish the flame, use a snuffer paddle, regulator, or saucer. Never blow out the flame or use your hands to extinguish flames.
9. Let the can cool before touching it. Don't touch cans that are still hot.

For more information, review the [Sterno Safety Posters](#).

## One Hour Before the Event Begins

One hour (60 minutes) before the event starts, complete these activities:

- Check that the panic hardware on all exit doors operates smoothly. If necessary, get help from security.
- Open all exit doors to verify the door swing and remove any obstructions. During winter and cold weather, ensure that there are no snow or ice obstructions.
- Ensure fire doors aren't blocked open or chained shut.
- Confirm that there are at least two clear exits.
- Confirm that exit signs are present, visible, and appear to be working properly.
- Check to make sure that handicapped accessible entrances are unlocked and unobstructed.
- Ensure all corridors, stairways, and egress passageways are clear and unobstructed.



- Confirm that emergency lights are operational.
- Confirm adjoining spaces don't pose obvious fire hazards.
- Ensure fire extinguishers are available for use. Verify the pressure gauge is in the green zone and there is a current inspection tag attached.
- Know the location of manual fire alarm pull stations and confirm that they are visible and easily accessible.
- Contact the Operations Center to help correct any deficiencies or obstructions.

## Fire Alarm Evacuation Announcement

This announcement or a similar announcement must be made at the start of the event, and between musical sets:

“In the event of a fire alarm, please proceed calmly to your nearest exit, leave the building, and move away from the building. Please note the location of the nearest exit to you. Be aware that the way you entered the building may not be the closest way out. Sitting or standing in the aisles and doorways is not permitted. Smoking is not allowed inside any Harvard building. Please turn off or silence all pagers and cell phones. Thank you and enjoy the performance.”

## During the Event

- Ensure that the occupancy capacity of the space isn't exceeded.
- Continue to monitor all exits, halls, and stairways to ensure they remain clear and unobstructed.
- Ask anyone blocking an aisle or a doorway to move.

## After the Event

After the event is over, the responsible person must complete and sign the Fire and Building Safety Checklist to verify that all appropriate fire safety procedures were accomplished.

Follow your school's document retention requirements.