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NFPA 101 Fire Watch Requirements

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has established a set of guidelines known as the Life Safety Codes. These guidelines are designed to protect lives and property from the hazards presented by fire. The NFPA 101 code is written to provide guidelines and recommendations. However, the instructions provided by the NFPA are not law unless a government agency chooses to make them so.

When to Watch

Some buildings are required by law to have fire alarm and automatic sprinkler systems. If either of these systems go down for more than four hours in a 24-hour period, NFPA 101 Section 9 requires the either the building to be evacuated or a fire watch to be established. Local authorities are to be notified of the equipment failure and subsequent fire watch. The fire watch must be maintained until the fire alarm and sprinkler systems are again properly functioning.

What to Watch

Members of a fire watch must regularly and thoroughly check all parts of a building that are affected by the fire alarm and sprinkler failures. This includes attics, crawl spaces, storage rooms, resident rooms, employee break rooms and concealed areas. Watchers are required to keep a log sheet of the rounds they make while on fire watch. The log is usually kept in a central location to make it easily accessible and to verify that it is not being tampered with.

Who Watches

Fire watchers should be familiar with the buildings and equipment they are watching. In addition to the facility's established fire emergency plan, watchers should know where manual fire alarm stations and fire protection equipment are located and be able to use them if necessary. Fire watch personnel must also be able to use communication devices, such as walkie-talkies and be trained on filling out fire watch log sheets. Any person who meets these criteria may be a fire watcher. During a fire watch, however, a watchers only job should be maintaining the fire watch.