



*Fire Marshal's Office*  
*San Mateo County Fire*  
**CAL FIRE**

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Revised: New

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Title: *Haunted Houses*

Approved: *Clayton Jolley*

**SCOPE:**

This guide is intended to provide safety standards and regulations for the construction and operation of temporary Haunted attractions/events open to the public.

These regulations shall apply to temporary Haunted Houses, Ghost Walks, or similar entertainment venues where combustible decorative material and confusing audio and/or visual effects are present. The requirements listed in this guideline were derived from the 2007 California Building Code (CBC), 2007 California Fire Code (CFC), and California Code of Regulations, Title 19.

**GENERAL:**

For the purposes of this guideline, certain terms and words are defined as follows:

**Haunted House** – a structure, or portion thereof, which guides people through a course where the means of egress is not apparent due to theatrical distractions, low illumination, temporary hallways, partitions and/or multiple rooms.

**Ghost Walk** – similar to haunted houses and may include both indoor and outdoor areas where egress to a public way is obscured or not readily identifiable.

**Policy:**

**Compliance Inspection Required:**

A Compliance Inspection shall be completed and deficiencies abated prior to the Haunted House opening to the public. Haunted House operator must call the San Mateo County Fire Prevention Bureau for an inspection allowing time for deficiencies to be corrected and a final inspection to be performed.

Upon arrival of the Inspector please have the following information available on-site with a copy for the Inspector.

**Floor Plan** showing the following:

- Dimensions (total square footage, width/type of exits, aisles or interior exit pathways).
- Locations of exits, exit signs, and emergency lighting units.
- Location of fire extinguishers.
- Location of electrical panel(s) and light switches.
- Location of smoke detectors and/or the fire alarm panel.
- Normal use of any structures(s) (i.e., warehouse, auditorium, school, church, etc.).
- Staff and performer positions.
- Queue line design and location.

A written emergency procedure (see below).

## **REQUIREMENTS:**

### **A. Emergency Planning**

- ❑ The maximum occupant load (including all staff and performers) shall be determined prior to the inspection. A sign stating the maximum occupant capacity shall be posted in a visible location near the entrance and staff shall control the flow of patrons so as not to exceed this limit.
- ❑ A written emergency procedure plan shall be provided to the Inspector and kept on-site. All employees shall be trained in emergency procedures.
- ❑ The emergency procedure plan shall include training of staff and familiarization with the fire alarm tone. Specific personnel shall be designated to turn off all distracting noises (i.e., the sound system) and turn on lights when alerted by either the fire alarm system or otherwise notified of an emergency condition.
- ❑ This event shall be adequately staffed to control the occupant load and assist patrons in exiting should an evacuation become necessary. An appropriate staffing level shall be determined upon initial inspection and may be increased at the discretion of the inspector.
- ❑ All emergency staff shall carry flashlights and know the location of all exits, fire extinguishers, light switches, electrical panels, and emergency phones.
- ❑ A fire drill may be required.
- ❑ Phone communication shall be readily available for the purpose of calling 911 in the event of an emergency.
- ❑ Specialized conditions and additional exiting shall be required for structures that are not approved as an assembly.

### **B. Exits**

- ❑ Two exits shall be provided from each room with an occupant load of 50 or more.
- ❑ Required exit doors shall swing in the direction of egress. Tents shall have a contrasting sliding panel without Velcro.
- ❑ Fabric used in the exit path shall not overlap. The curtain must be cut from top to bottom and not secured in any way.
- ❑ Illuminated exit signs with battery backup shall be provided at each exit serving an occupant load of 50 or more. Non-illuminated exit signs shall be provided for all exits serving an occupant load of less than 50. Exit signs with aftermarket switches are not approved.
- ❑ Exit doors serving an occupant load of 50 or more shall not be provided with a latch or lock unless it is panic hardware.
- ❑ Emergency lighting with battery backup shall be provided in all rooms, areas, and exit pathways when serving an occupant load of 100 or more. Emergency lighting with aftermarket switches are not approved.

- ❑ Decorative materials, props and/or performer platforms shall not obstruct, confuse, or obscure exits, pathways, exit signs, or emergency lighting units.
- ❑ Additional pathway marking, including low-level marking and signs may be required at the time of field inspection.

### **C. Fire Protection**

- ❑ Approved automatic fire sprinkler systems/piping, when provided, shall not be obstructed, altered or used to support any decoration.
- ❑ Approved automatic smoke detection systems, when provided, shall not be obstructed, altered or turned off.
- ❑ Provide a public address system in accordance with the CBC as required for amusement buildings. *Exception: When the total floor area is less than 1000 square feet and the travel distance to an exit is less than 50 feet, manually activated devices suitable for sounding an alarm or another approved method of alerting staff, shall be provided as approved by San Mateo Co. Fire. The alarm shall be distinctive in tone and be audible throughout the haunted house/area.*
- ❑ Fire extinguishers shall have a minimum (2A10BC) rating and be properly mounted five feet from the floor to the top of the extinguisher. They must be visible and accessible at all times. Travel distance to an extinguisher shall not exceed 75 feet.
- ❑ Decorative material shall not obstruct fire sprinklers, fire extinguishers and signs, fire alarm “pull stations”, fire alarm horns/strobes or any other fire protection equipment inside or outside the building.

### **D. Electrical**

- ❑ Extension cords shall be UL listed, in good condition, and appropriate for their use.
- ❑ Only UL listed power strips with overcurrent protection shall be used when the number of outlets provided is inadequate. Power strips shall be plugged directly into provided outlets and shall not be plugged into one another in series.
- ❑ All extension cords and power strips shall be adequately protected from foot traffic (i.e., bridged) if paths of travel cannot be avoided.
- ❑ An electrical permit may be required. Contact your local building department for requirements.
- ❑ Flood and strobe lights shall be plugged directly into a wall outlet, a listed multiplug power strip, or a single listed extension cord. For string lighting, refer to the manufacturer’s installation guidelines for the maximum number of string lights that may be connected. When plugging the string lights together, the total amperage of all the light strings shall be calculated to ensure they do not exceed the amperage for the extension cord and circuit.

#### **E. Decorative Materials**

- ❑ All decorative materials (decorations, drapes, backdrops, and props) shall be either inherently flame retardant and labeled as such or shall be treated with a flame retardant registered with the California State Fire Marshal. Any material not appropriately labeled or certified as fire retardant shall be flame tested and approved by San Mateo County Fire/CALFIRE.

#### **F. Miscellaneous**

- ❑ Care and consideration shall be used with respect to smoke generators and smoke detector locations. Use of smoke generators may be restricted if they are determined to be incompatible with smoke detectors.
- ❑ “NO SMOKING” signs shall be provided at the entrance and throughout the attraction.
- ❑ Storage and/or use of flammable or combustible liquids, gasses, and solids are prohibited.
- ❑ Candles or any open flame are prohibited.
- ❑ Good housekeeping shall be maintained throughout the attraction and exit pathways.
- ❑ Provide signage at the ticket office and/or entrance of the attraction notifying the public if strobe lights and theatrical smoke effects are used.