

Fire Drills in Schools and ISO Credit

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Section 1000 of the ISO Fire Suppression Rating Schedule evaluates the community risk reduction efforts in a community. Part of Section 1032B1, Fire Safety Education in Schools, evaluates fire safety efforts in schools, including the conducting of monthly fire drills. This section requires that "Each school must conduct 1 fire exit drill, in accordance with the general criteria of NFPA 101, *Life Safety Code*, or the ICC International Fire Code each month that the campus is in session."

As with all things, these drills must be documented properly in order for the community to receive credit. ISO does not have a prescribed form for documenting fire drills, so the authority having jurisdiction is free to use whatever form is appropriate for local needs. If your department does not have a form, the following form is an example of a form that documents a fire drill. The form is a Word document, and the local jurisdiction may edit the form to meet local needs.

In 2017, the Tennessee legislature lessened the requirement for evacuation drills in educational occupancies, reducing the annual number of required fire exit drills.

Before May 25, 2017, the law required:

T.C.A. § 68-102-137(b) Fire drills requiring full evacuation shall be held at least once a month during the school year, with an additional fire drill to be conducted within the first thirty (30) days of operation in educational occupancies where such occupancies constitute the major occupancy of a building, and at least once every two (2) months in institutional occupancies where such occupancies constitute the major occupancy of a building. A record of all fire drills, including the time and date, shall be kept in the respective school or institutional offices, and shall be made available upon request to the state fire marshal, or the state fire marshal's deputies or assistants, for inspection and review.

As of May 25, 2017, the law is:

T.C.A. § 68-102-137(b) Fire drills requiring full evacuation in educational occupancies where such occupancies constitute the major occupancy of a building shall be held at least one (1) time every thirty (30) school days, with two (2) fire drills occurring during the first thirty (30) full days of the school year. Additionally, four (4) fire safety educational announcements will be conducted throughout the year. The LEA will develop the content of the educational announcements. Fire drills requiring full evacuation shall be held at least once every two (2) months in institutional occupancies where such occupancies constitute the major occupancy of a building.

What changed? Consider a 9 month school year, and Tennessee requires that students attend school at least 180 days during the school year:

- Old law: 10 drills, no required fire safety announcements
- New law: 7 drills, 4 required fire safety announcements

The change in the law reduced the number of required fire drills by 42.86%. Even though the law now requires at least four “fire safety educational announcements,” an announcement is not the same as a drill. The purpose of a fire drills is to familiarize building occupants (students and teachers) with emergency procedures and the location of exits within the building. Fire drills help ensure that building occupants react properly in the event of an actual fire in the building. Announcements do not ensure that occupants know the location of exits or that occupants will react properly in the event of a fire.

The fire department does not have to witness every fire drill, but MTAS recommends that the fire department witness at least one drill per educational facility per year, and more drills if possible.

Every fire drill must be documented. Each school must keep copies of the fire drill reports on file, and should forward a copy of every fire drill report to the fire department. The fire department should maintain copies of fire drill reports in each school’s occupancy file.

Analysis:

Fire drills provide students and teachers with important safety behaviors should a fire occur in a school. ISO awards credit for fire drills, so the fire department should encourage documented, monthly fire drills.

In 2017, the state weakened fire safety in regards to fire drills, and the new law is less stringent than NFPA and ISO requirements. MTAS believes that state law preempts local regulation in this field, and a city may not impose additional fire drill requirements. However, the law sets a minimum level of drills and does not prohibit a school having more drills (i.e. one (1) drill every thirty (30) school days) so any school can hold as many fire drills as it wants to.

ISO does not award credit for fire safety announcements in lieu of evacuation drills. The fire department should consider asking the local schools to conduct at least one fire drill per month. In light of recent school shootings, the fire department should discuss fire drill requirements with local law enforcement and school officials to provide for student and teacher safety during fire drills.

Fire Drill Checklist for an Educational Facility

Facility Name: _____

Facility Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Principal: _____

Date of Fire Drill: _____ Time of Alarm Activation: _____

From where was the alarm activated? pull station on wall fire alarm panel

Did the fire doors close automatically when the alarm sounded? Yes No

Was the fire alarm audible throughout the building(s)? Yes No

Occupant Load at the Time of the Drill (students, teachers, visitors): _____

Evaluation Criteria

1. Drill was conducted in an orderly manner Yes No
2. Drill was conducted promptly Yes No
3. Fire department was notified Yes No
4. Alarm company was notified Yes No
5. Doors to classrooms, etc. were closed Yes No
6. All occupants evacuated to a safe distance Yes No
7. Occupants met at pre-designated meeting place(s) Yes No
8. Assigned duties carried out effectively by staff Yes No
9. All staff and students accounted for outside Yes No
10. Occupants waited for "All Clear" signal before reentering building(s) Yes No

Total Time Taken to Complete the Fire Drill: _____

Comments: _____

Principal's Signature: _____