

Handling System Impairments / Fire Watch Procedures

There may be instances when a building or area of a building is left unprotected by a code required fire protection system. This may be due to a planned event, like maintenance or repair to a fire sprinkler system. Or it could be the result of an unplanned event, like a lightning strike that damages the fire alarm system. Regardless of why the system is impaired, the South Carolina Fire Code requires that either the building be evacuated and no longer occupied for any purpose, or that an approved fire watch procedure be put in place. The following guidelines and form is intended to document the owner's intent and responsibility in implementing a fire watch for fire protection system impairments. (SCFC 901.7)

Step 1: The owner must designate an impairment coordinator. The impairment coordinator is responsible for identifying the impairment, initiating the fire watch program, coordinating and procuring the repair of the system, ensuring that all notification and documentation is completed, restoring the system and the operations of the facility back to normal.

Step 2: Notify the local fire department. The fire code requires that the local responding fire department be notified of the impairment right away. Additionally, the local fire department may want to review and approve your fire watch program.

Step 3: Tag the system out of service. Post a sign or tag that indicates that the system is not working correctly, at the fire alarm panel, main sprinkler control valves, FDC, or other locations where impaired equipment might otherwise be assumed to be operational. The sign should provide enough detail about the system impairment that the reader understands the consequences of the impairment.

Step 4: Evaluate conditions and identify any increased risks created by the impairment. This evaluation will assist the impairment coordinator in determining the next steps. If the building will continue to be occupied, the owner, building managers, supervisors, and employees should all be notified of the system impairment, any increased risks, and any behavior changes that must occur as a result of the impairment during normal facility operation and in the event of an alarm or fire.

Step 5: Designate responsible persons to perform a fire watch in the area affected by the system impairment. The fire watch personnel shall have no other duties except to intervene in the absence of the impaired fire protection system in the event of a fire. This may require the fire watch personnel to patrol the building to look for signs of an unwanted fire. It may require the fire watch personnel to have a plan and method to initiate evacuation of the building. The fire watch personnel must have a means to communicate to the fire department (call 911). The fire watch personnel should report only to the designated impairment coordinator. The impairment coordinator is responsible for developing the fire watch plan that describes the specific duties for the fire watch personnel.

Step 6: Document the performance of the fire watch program. This may include activity logs completed by the fire watch personnel. The documentation will serve as proof to the authorities having jurisdiction that the owner is satisfactorily performing the fire watch procedures.

Step 7: Coordinate the repairs of the system. The impairment coordinator shall secure the necessary resources to correct the impairment. When the impairment is planned, all equipment and personnel necessary to make the repair or perform the maintenance should be assembled prior to taking the system out of service. In all cases, design professionals, licensed contractors, and building permits must be secured when required by law, regulation or ordinance.

Step 8: Restore the system to normal conditions. All system tests and inspections must be performed prior to returning the system to normal conditions. After the system is restored to normal, impairment tags and labels may be removed. Next, notify the fire department that the system has been returned to normal. Finally, end the fire watch procedure and maintain all documentation for at least 1 year after the end of the fire watch procedure.

The health and safety of the occupants of a building are always the responsibility of the building owner and operator. The SC Office of State Fire Marshal and the local fire department has the authority to perform and inspection of your facility at any time. Should a required fire protection system be found to be impaired, and an approved fire watch procedure is not being conducted while the building is occupied, the building may be required to be evacuated and posted as an unsafe building and the building owner may be subject to civil or criminal penalties. (SCFC 110, SC Code of Law 23-9-150, 23-9-170)



Fire Protection System Impairment Record

Section 1. Responsible Party

Date and time of impairment: _____

Name of Facility: _____

Address: _____

Impairment Coordinator: _____

Impairment Coordinator's 24 hour phone number: _____

Section 2. Impairment Details

Describe the type of fire protection system impairment: _____

Describe the increased risks created by the impairment: _____

Anticipated duration of the impairment: _____

The building or area affected by the impairment will be:

Unoccupied during the duration of the impairment.

Occupied with the performance of an approved fire watch for the duration of the impairment.

Section 3. Fire Watch Details

Identify the areas of the building included in the fire watch: _____

Identify the persons responsible for conducting the fire watch: _____

Fire watch will include (check all that apply):

- Continuous, systematic surveillance of all areas affected by the impairment.
- Identifying and controlling fire hazards.
- Providing a method to initiate building evacuation.
- Providing a method to notify the fire department of a fire.
- Fire watch personnel shall have no other duties but these listed above.

Describe the communications plan between the fire watch and building occupants: _____

Describe the communications plan between the fire watch and fire department: _____

Describe the documentation requirements to be maintained during the fire watch to demonstrate

compliance with the program, typically an activity log. _____

Impairment Coordinator's Signature: _____

Date: _____

4. Restoring Systems to Service:

Repairs will require:

AHJ to approve plans/issue permits: _____

SC Licensed Design Professional: _____

SC Licensed Contractor: _____

Date and time repairs are initiated: _____

Date and time repairs are completed: _____

Date and time fire watch procedures are ended: _____

Note: Inspections and tests of the affected fire protection systems must be approved by the permitting AHJ prior to the end of the fire watch procedure. Removal of impairment tags and labels and the notification to fire department and other responsible parties that the system may be returned to normal must occur prior to the end of the fire watch procedure. Fire watch procedure documentation must be maintained for 1 year after the conclusion of the impairment.

Impairment Coordinator's Signature: _____

Date: _____