

Fire Watch Procedures

A **fire watch** is a critical safety measure that is implemented after some fires or when fire protection systems (such as alarms or sprinklers) are temporarily out of service usually for longer than four hours. The primary purpose of a fire watch is to ensure that the fire has been fully extinguished, and the building remains safe for the occupants by continuously monitoring for fire hazards.

Here are some of the key measures that should be considered in an effective fire watch:

1. Clear Fire Watch Procedures and Responsibilities

- **Designated Personnel:** Specific individuals or a team should be assigned the duty of maintaining the fire watch. These individuals need to be trained in fire safety and basic emergency response.
- **24/7 Coverage:** The fire watch should be continuous and cover all hours, including nights and weekends, until the fire is determined to be out or the fire protection systems (alarm and sprinkler) are fully functional.
- **Defined Areas to Patrol:** Fire watch personnel should have clear instructions on which areas of the building they are responsible for patrolling. This includes any areas where fire hazards might be higher, such as kitchens, electrical rooms, and areas with vulnerable residents.

2. Regular Patrols

- **Frequency of Patrols:** Patrols should be conducted at regular intervals, often recommended as every 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the size of the building and level of risk. The intervals must be strictly adhered to, with no gaps in coverage.
- **Comprehensive Coverage:** Fire watch personnel should patrol the entire building, especially high-risk areas, to identify potential fire hazards or signs of fire. This includes checking for issues like blocked egress routes, overheating appliances, or misuse of electrical systems.

3. Communication and Reporting

- **Documenting Patrols:** Each patrol should be logged, with the date, time, and any findings recorded. This log serves as proof that the fire watch was active and functioning properly.
- **Immediate Reporting of Hazards:** Any fire hazards identified (such as blocked exits, faulty wiring, or improper use of appliances) should be immediately reported to the building management and the fire department.



4. Means of Communication

- **Access to Communication Devices:** Fire watch personnel must be equipped with working communication devices, such as cell phones or two-way radios, to report any fire or emergency immediately.
- **Direct Line to Emergency Services:** Personnel should be instructed on how to contact the fire department directly in case of fire or imminent danger.

5. Evacuation Plans

- **Knowledge of Egress Routes:** Fire watch personnel should be trained on all exit routes and evacuation procedures, especially important for residents who might need assistance due to age, disability, or language barriers.
- **Assistance for Vulnerable Residents:** In buildings housing marginalized or vulnerable populations, special attention must be given to ensure these residents are safely evacuated in case of fire. The fire watch team should be aware of which residents might need assistance during an evacuation.

6. Fire Extinguishing Equipment

- **Access to Portable Fire Extinguishers:** Fire watch personnel should be trained in the use of portable fire extinguishers and have them readily accessible to control small fires until the fire department arrives.
- **Checking Fire Extinguishers and Fire Escapes:** Fire watch personnel should inspect portable fire extinguishers to ensure they are functional. They should also check fire escape routes to make sure they are unobstructed and accessible.

7. Collaboration with the Fire Department

- **Coordination with the Fire Department:** The fire watch should be coordinated with and approved by the local fire department. The fire department should be informed when the fire watch begins and before its termination.
- **Compliance with Fire Department Mandates:** Fire watch personnel must follow the specific instructions or requirements laid out by the fire department.

8. Contingency Plan for Alarm System Restoration

- **Expedited Repairs:** A clear timeline and plan for restoring out of service fire protection systems like fire alarm or sprinkler systems should be in place. The fire watch should only be a temporary measure while the system is being repaired.
- **Follow-up Inspections:** Once the fire protection system is restored and verified by a qualified technician, the fire department may allow the fire watch could be lifted.



9. Temporary Alarms or Notification Systems

- **Portable Smoke Alarms:** Temporary battery-operated smoke alarms may be installed in critical areas of the building while the main fire alarm system is down, providing some level of early detection in case of fire.
- **Public Address System:** If available, the building's PA system should be used to communicate warnings or emergency instructions to residents in the event of an incident during the fire watch.

10. Accountability and Supervision

- **Building Management Accountability:** The building owner or management is responsible for ensuring the fire watch is functioning properly. They should have supervised the process, ensuring that all requirements were met.
- **Verification by Authorities:** Periodic verification by the fire department or another authority should be undertaken to ensure the fire watch is being effectively conducted.

If the measures in the fire watch are not properly implemented or enforced, they may contribute to the escalation of an event. A failure to maintain an effective fire watch is a serious lapse that can have catastrophic consequences, especially in buildings with vulnerable residents.