



HCFMO

Harris County Fire Marshal

M.S. Montgomery
Fire Marshal

FIRE INSPECTION GUIDELINES FOR FOSTER GROUP HOME PARENTS

Effective June 1, 2002, Update September 2011

EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2007

These guidelines are designed to help you understand and prepare for a fire inspection of your foster group home if you are **licensed for 7 to 12 children**. **ALL items below must be completed prior to the fire inspection.**

In accordance with Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) guidelines, foster group home licensed for 7 to 12 children must have a formal fire inspection upon verification. In accordance with Local Government Code, Chapter 352.016, all fire and life safety inspections in unincorporated Harris County must be performed by a Certified Fire Inspector. The Fire & Life Safety Inspection Standard is “**NFPA 101[®], Life Safety Code, 2009 Edition**”. All foster group homes should be in compliance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA) where applicable.

TDFPS and HCFMO have worked together to develop this fire inspection checklist for foster group homes located outside city limits in Harris County. Most of the requirements on the checklist are easy to understand, but a few may need some explanation.

1. Foster group home having 7 to 12 children living in the home. TDFPS does not allow more than 12 children in a foster group home.
2. Foster group home may be a 1- or 2-family dwelling or multi-family dwelling. If you live in a multi-family dwelling (apartment), the building must also comply with applicable chapters of NFPA 101. Please contact HCFMO to discuss the additional inspection requirements.
3. Physical address numbers/letters shall be clearly visible from the roadway and a minimum height of 4 inches, stroke width ½ inch in a contrasting color.
4. Foster group homes shall provide documentation that an evacuation plan (drawing showing evacuation routes) and procedures for meeting potential disasters and emergencies, such as fire and severe weather are in place.
5. Foster group homes are not required to install a fire sprinkler system if licensed for 7 to 8 children. **EXCEPTION:** Foster group homes that receive an evacuation rating of slow or impractical shall be required to install a fire sprinkler system. Ratings are based on the time it takes for all persons in the home to evacuate to a point of safety. The home shall be classified as:

Prompt:	All residents are able to evacuate to a point of safety within 3 minutes.
Slow:	All residents are capable of evacuating to a point of safety within 13 minutes. Some residents may require assistance from the staff.
Impractical:	Residents cannot move reliably to a point of safety within 13 minutes, even with assistance.

Fire drills shall be practiced at least twelve times a year. One of the drills must be practiced at night, during normal sleeping times. You must use the fire drill form provided by the Harris County Fire Marshal’s Office for each fire drill practice. Each month shall consist of a new form. All monthly fire drill forms must be properly completed and signed. Homes not completing the fire drill forms will be considered IMPRACTICAL evacuation and shall be required to install a fire sprinkler system. All fire drill forms must be kept available for review for at least 2 years.

A copy of your fire drill records must be made available to the Fire Inspector at the time of inspection. This will allow the Harris County Fire Marshal’s Office to review the evacuation capability (i.e. Prompt, Slow, Impractical) of your home. All persons within the home must participate and must be rated in the drill. ***If your evacuation capability rating changes from prompt to either slow or impractical, your home will be required to meet more stringent guidelines.***

Foster group homes with 9 to 12 children shall install a fire sprinkler system in the home; it must be designed, installed, and maintained in compliance with the applicable sections of NFPA 13D or 13R, *Installation of Sprinkler Systems*. A fire sprinkler company is required to submit for a permit prior to installation of system. A copy of the fire sprinkler test report must be made available to the fire inspector at the time of inspection. It must include company information and findings of the test.

6. No high-hazard contents – flammable liquids, explosives, or similar materials -- shall be stored or used in the foster group home. Not more than 10 gallons of flammable liquid (e.g. gasoline) shall be on the property. Flammable liquids must be stored in approved containers with tight-fitting lids; kept away from children, and away from heat sources (including water heater).
7. Two primary exits are required and must be remotely located from each other. The maximum travel distance must not exceed 75 feet.
8. Every sleeping area, dining area, and living area must have a secondary way to escape that is independent of, and remotely located from the primary means of escape. This escape route must not require any tools, keys, special knowledge or effort. The secondary escape may be:
 1. A door leading directly to the outside at street or ground level;
 2. A non-locking door into an adjoining room/space with an approved means of escape;
 3. An approved outside window that has a minimum opening of 5.7 square feet; and is at least 20 inches wide, 24 inches high, and no higher than 44 inches above the floor, provided that one of the following is met:
 - (a) The window is within 20 feet of grade.
 - (b) The window is directly accessible to the fire department rescue apparatus, as approved by the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office.
 - (c) The window or door opens onto an exterior balcony.
9. **Security bars on window must be releasable or removable from the inside without the use of a key, tool or special knowledge.**
10. Doors must be at least 28 inches wide and 80 inches high. Bathroom doors must not be less than 24 in. wide, and must be able to be opened from the outside when locked. Children must be able to open closet doors from the inside. Exterior doors can be either “sliding” or “swinging” type, with an approved door lock set. Double-keyed dead bolt locks are not allowed – a thumb latch device is allowed for the dead bolt locks.
11. Bedrooms / living areas above the first floor must be accessible by an approved set of stairs. Combustibles are not permitted to be stored in the exit path. Combustibles must not be stored under the stairs unless the underside of the stairs is protected to a ½-hour fire-rating (e.g. one layer of 1/2” sheetrock, properly installed and sealed.)
12. Hallways must be at least 36 inches wide, existing family homes minimum of 28 inches wide.
13. Interior wall and ceiling finish must be Class A, B, or C rated. The separation walls of sleeping rooms must be capable of resisting fire for at least 20 minutes. *Most painted, or wallpapered, sheetrock walls meet this requirement.* Some textiles, paneling, plastic trims, or multiple layers of wallpaper may not meet this requirement and must be removed. Any vision panels, if installed, must be of wired glass not exceeding 1,296 sq. inches in area and installed in approved frames.
14. Foster group home smoke detection/fire warning system must comply with the CODEWORD - FIRE WARNING SYSTEM IN FOSTER GROUP HOMES. Existing fire alarm systems must remain in place and are not required to be modified if there is not a change in evacuation status or number of children. Fire alarm systems are required to be inspected annually.
15. Sleeping room doors in foster group home licensed for 7 to 12 children must be self-closing or automatic closing, and 20-minute fire-rated, such as a 1-¾ inch thick, solid-bonded wood core construction, or it's equal. Sleeping room doors must remain closed or be provided with an approved hold-open device that will release upon activation of fire alarm system or loss of power. Sleeping room doors must be provided with latches or other mechanisms suitable for keeping the doors closed. **EXCEPTION:** Foster group homes having an approved fire sprinkler system installed excludes the automatic closure requirement.
16. Stoves, ovens, heaters, and fireplaces must be equipped with metal tubing, connectors and properly vented. Un-vented, fuel-fired heaters are not permitted. A gas stove or oven must have an approved gas cock valve in the supply line located at the equipment connection point. Heaters and fireplaces must be equipped with screens to prevent contact with open flames or hot surfaces. Dryers must be vented to the outside of home using metal (solid or flexible) vent piping.
17. Gas water heaters must be properly vented (double wall vent pipe) to the outside of home. An approved vented safety pressure relief valve and drain pipe shall be provided. Gas water heaters must be mounted at least 18 inches above the floor, if installed in a garage area. All flammable liquids or combustibles must not be stored near the water heater.
18. Gas piping must be inspected annually for gas leaks by a Texas Licensed Plumbing Contractor prior to the fire inspection. A copy of the gas pipe test report from the Licensed Plumbing Contractor must be made available to the fire inspector at

the time of the inspection. The report must include company information, license number and findings of the gas leak test.

19. Heating and air-conditioning equipment must be inspected by a Texas Licensed Air Conditioning Contractor the first year, with optional inspections thereafter. A copy of the heating and air condition report indicating system have been installed and maintained in accordance with *NFPA 90A, Standard for the Installation of Air Conditioning and Ventilating Systems*, or *NFPA 90B, Standard for the Installation of Warm Air Heating and Air Conditioning Systems*, as applicable must be made available to the fire inspector at the time of the inspection. The report must include company information and findings of the heating and air condition equipment.
20. Combustibles must be stored away from stoves, heaters, fireplaces, or other heat producing equipment. Good housekeeping habits must be practiced with no accumulated trash or combustible materials. Smoking is restricted to safe areas, with proper non-combustible ashtrays or receptacles. Smoking must not be permitted in sleeping areas.
21. Foster group home must provide at least one UL (Underwriter's Laboratory) listed ABC fire extinguisher for every 2000 square feet of living area. Fire extinguisher requirements are:
 - a. Minimum size is 2A-10B:C or 5 lb, with a working pressure gauge
 - b. Must have been purchased NEW within the past 12 months, OR has been inspected and tagged by a Licensed Fire Extinguisher Contractor within the past 12 months, and
 - c. Mount the fire extinguisher in a conspicuous place in or near the kitchen area, and
 - d. At least one fire extinguisher must be provided on every floor above the first floor, mounted in a conspicuous place.
22. Matches and lighters must be out of the reach of children.
23. Electrical system and appliances must be in good condition, with child-proof covers. Extension cords must be used in a safe manner.

If you have any questions about your fire inspection, contact Harris County Fire Marshal's Inspection Dept. at 281-436-8030.



Harris County Fire Marshal's Office

Inspection Checklist – Foster Group Homes

FmP23, update 9/11

In accordance with the “Minimum Standards & Guidelines for Texas Administrative Code: Title 40 (Jan 2007, TDFPS):

- The agency home must meet all applicable fire, health and safety laws, ordinances and regulations.
- The agency home or child-placing agency must request the necessary inspections and comply with any resulting recommendations.
- Fire inspections must be conducted **annually** and must meet or exceed regulations set by the Harris County Fire Marshal.
- A fire inspection report must be submitted to the child-placing agency at the time of verification and annually thereafter.

In accordance with Local Government Code, Chapter 352.016, all fire and life safety inspections in unincorporated Harris County must be performed by a HCFMO Certified Fire Inspector. The Fire & Life Safety Inspection Standard is “NFPA 101®, Life Safety Code, 2009 Edition”.

This checklist is provided as a service to help the foster group home parent or operator to maintain a fire safe environment. The information is based on the Harris County Fire & Life Safety Inspection Standard for foster group homes. This standard may be different from building codes and fire codes in cities or other jurisdictions.

No.	Item	Code Ref.	OK	Not OK	N/A
1	A foster group home with 7 to 12 children living in the home.	TAC, Title 40-EG1			
2	1- or 2-family dwelling. If a multi-family dwelling, contact HCFMO. More stringent guidelines will apply.	4.6.1.2-EG2			
3	Address is clearly visible from the roadway.	4.6.1.2-EG3			
4	A written evacuation plan and procedures for meeting potential disasters and emergencies, such as fire and severe weather is in place.	TAC, Title 40-EG4			
5	Evacuation capability verified with HCFMO monthly fire drill form. The home is required to install an automatic fire sprinkler system if serving 9 or more children or evacuation response is more than 3 minutes.	TAC Title 40-F4 33.2.1.2-EG5			
6	No high-hazard contents stored in the building. Flammable liquids: Not more than 10 gallons; stored in approved containers with tight-fitting lids, kept away from children, and away from heat sources (including water heater)	4.6.1.2-EG6			
7	Two primary exits per story remotely located from each other. (No travel distances greater than 75 ft.)	33.2.2-EG7			
8	Secondary escape from each sleeping areas, dining area, and living areas other than the “front” or “back” door of the home. Requires no tools, keys, or special knowledge or effort. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Door leading directly to the outside, or • Approved outside window with a minimum opening of 5.7 sq. ft, and at least 20 in. wide, 24 in. high, and no higher than 44 in. above the floor, or • A non-locking door into an adjoining room that has an exit described above. 	33.2.2.3-EG8			
9	Security bars are operable without the use of key, tools, or special knowledge.	4.6.1.2-EG9			
10	Doors are at least 28 inches in width and 80 inches in height. Bathroom doors may not be less than 24 inches in width, and must be able to be opened from the outside when locked. Closet doors can be opened by a child from the inside. No double-keyed dead bolts on exterior doors	33.2.2.5-EG10			
11	All bedrooms / living areas above the first floor are accessible by an approved set of stairs and a ½-hr fire rated barrier.	33.2.2.6-EG12			
12	Hallways must be at least 36 inches wide, existing family homes minimum of 28 inches wide.	4.6.1.2-EG13			
13	Interior wall and ceiling finish are Class A, B, or C. Vision panels are approved, fixed fire window assemblies or wired glass not greater than 1,296 sq. in.	33.2.3.3-EG14			
14	Proper smoke detection/fire warning system provided and meets the requirements of the Foster Group Alarm Codeword. Smoke detection/fire warning system is required to be inspected annually.	4.6.1.2-EG15 4.6.1.2-F15			
15	Sleeping area doors in a foster group home with 7 to 12 children are self-closing or automatic closing, suitable latching mechanism installed and 20 minute fire rated. Exception: Automatic closure not required if a fire sprinkler system is installed.	33.2.3.6.4-EG16			
16	Stoves, ovens, heaters, and fireplaces must be equipped with metal tubing, connectors, and properly vented. Heaters and fireplaces equipped with screens to prevent contact with open flames or hot surfaces. Approved gas cock valve in supply line for gas kitchen stove or oven. Dryers are equipped with metal vent piping.	9.2.2-EG17			
17	Water heater equipped with a pressure relief device, and drain pipe. Gas water heaters mounted at least 18 in. above floor in garage area and properly vented to the exterior.	9.2.2-EG18			
18	Gas piping inspected annually by a Texas Licensed Plumbing Contractor prior to fire inspection.	9.1.1-EG19			
19	A/C, heating systems inspected by a Texas Licensed Air-Conditioning Contractor prior to fire inspection.	9.2.1-EG20			
20	Combustibles are stored away from stoves, heaters, or fireplaces. Good housekeeping habits are in place.	4.6.1.2-EG21			
21	Fire extinguishers (min. 2A-10B:C or 5-lb.) in kitchen area to protect the first 2000 sq. ft., and one for each floor above the first floor. New or annual inspection and tag by a Licensed Fire Extinguisher Contractor.	4.6.1.2-EG22			
22	Matches and lighters are out of the reach of children.	4.6.1.2-EG24			
23	Electrical system / appliances in good condition, child-proof outlet covers and safe use of extension cords.	9.1.2-EG25			

Mobility Status Factor. Mobility status is based on the capability of each person to take actions necessary for self-protection. The four classes are defined as follows:

- (1) **Mobile.** Capable of readily rising from bed and taking self-protecting actions at approximately the same rate as a healthy adult. To be classified as mobile, the person must not need assistance in getting out of bed and must be able to open a closed or locked door. Persons shall be considered to be mobile if they are not restrained or in any other way limited in response capabilities so that the type of arousal mechanism that normally would awaken an adult is effective. **THIS IS A PROMPT STATUS.** *All persons are able to evacuate to a point of safety within 3 minutes.*
- (2) **Limited Mobility.** Those persons who have all of the capabilities of a mobile person except that their rate of travel is significantly slower. May require assistance from staff. **THIS IS A SLOW STATUS.** *All persons are able to evacuate to a point of safety within 13 minutes.*
- (3) **Not Mobile.** Persons incapable of removing themselves from danger exclusively by their own efforts. Examples include persons who are totally bedridden; who need assistance getting out of bed or moving; and who are restrained, or otherwise prevented from taking complete emergency self-protection evacuation actions without assistance. **THIS IS AN IMPRACTICAL STATUS.** *All persons are unable to evacuate to a point of safety within 13 minutes.*
- (4) **Not Movable.** Persons incapable of being moved from the room in which they are housed during the course of a fire. Examples include patients attached to life-support systems or involved in medical or surgical procedures that prohibit their immediate relocation without extreme danger of death or serious harm. **THIS IS AN IMPRACTICAL STATUS.** *All persons are unable to evacuate to a point of safety within 13 minutes.*



CODE WORD

This procedure is used to clarify provisions of the NFPA 101® Life Safety Code, 2009 Edition. Its sole intent is to clarify what is acceptable practice.

Issue date: August 1, 2009

Subject: **Fire Warning Systems in Foster Group Homes**

Question: *What kind of fire warning system is required in a foster group home?*

Answer: The type of alarm depends on the number of foster children living in the home and must be in accordance with the requirements of NFPA 101® Life Safety Code. To help you understand the system requirements, we have developed the following guidelines:

Definitions:

Smoke Alarm. A device that detects smoke that has a built in sounder to alert occupants that smoke has been detected. These devices can be stand alone or multiple stations.

Smoke Detector. A device that detects smoke that is interconnected with a fire alarm control unit.

Requirements:

Foster group homes licensed for **7 to 8 foster children** with prompt evacuation shall install a monitored household fire warning system in compliance with NFPA 72, 2002 Chapter 11. Smoke detectors shall be installed in each sleeping area and outside of each sleeping area, in the immediate vicinity of sleeping rooms. Smoke detectors shall be provided on every level of the home, including basements. Smoke detectors shall be arranged so that the operation of any smoke or heat detector causes the alarm to sound in all smoke and heat detectors within the home. A keypad with a fire panic button shall be provided at the front door. The keypad fire panic button shall sound the alarm in each smoke and heat detector within the home. If the home has a fire sprinkler system, the system flow switch and supervisory switches shall be connected to the household fire warning system. A fire alarm monitoring contract must be activated before the HCFMO inspection. A floor plan (does not need to be to scale) with the locations and point to point wiring of every device and battery/voltage drop calculations shall be made available to the fire inspector at the time of the inspection. The design of and including battery/voltage drop calculations shall be certified by a Texas RAS or APS. Household fire warning systems are required to be inspected annually.

Foster group homes licensed for **more than 8 foster children** shall have a fire alarm system installed. The system shall be installed in accordance with NFPA 72, 2002. Smoke detectors shall be installed in each sleeping areas and in all paths of egress. Manual pull boxes shall be installed at every exit. The fire sprinkler system's flow switch and supervisory switches shall be connected to the fire alarm system. Audible appliances shall be installed so that the sound level is 15db above normal ambient noise level. Where required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), visual appliances shall be installed in common areas, sleeping rooms, restrooms and hallways. The fire alarm system shall be monitored by a licensed monitoring station. The fire alarm system shall be inspected annually.