



## HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

M. S. Montgomery  
*Fire Marshal*

January 27, 2003

To: Property Managers/Property Owners  
Subject: **New Requirements for Multi-Unit Housing Projects  
(Gated Apartment, Town Home or Condominium)**

Dear Manager/Owner:

This letter is to advise you of the Harris County Commissioners Court Order regulating gated and non-gated multi-unit housing projects in the unincorporated areas of Harris County. **The order affects all facilities (condominiums, town homes, and apartments) that have more than one building GATED OR NOT, as the regulation also requires all multi-unit structures depict the number of units in each building. This regulation also includes gated subdivisions/communities.** A copy of the signed order, definitions and standards is attached. Please read it carefully.

In addition to this mail-out, we have established a section on our website (noted below) to answer questions regarding requirements, application and the inspection process. The section provides information and pictures illustrating proper access gates, driveways and building unit signage. Our office will begin inspecting multi-unit housing facilities upon receipt of your application at a one-time cost of \$50 per property. All projects must be in compliance of the gate access and/or the building unit identification by October 1, 2003.

The Harris County Fire Marshal's Office has adopted the KNOX Company locks as the standard meeting all requirements for secured access gates. Keys for these locks will be issued to the fire department and EMS in whose district your property is located. Selected law enforcement patrol personnel will be issued keys at a later date. All secured access gates will require the use of a KNOX device, which your property must purchase and to which only emergency services personnel have keys. (Questions regarding KNOX devices are accessible via a toll-free number, 1-800-552-5669 or ordering online at [www.knoxbox.com](http://www.knoxbox.com).) This will entail changing out existing generic locks or existing KNOX locks. Only KNOX locks at multi-unit housing projects throughout the county will be master-keyed alike affording access to mutual aid agencies. Each gated facility must also provide at least one driveway entrance, not necessarily the main one, meeting the access needs for emergency apparatus.

Most access gate companies are familiar with these types of locks and can provide installation or retrofitting service. An access gate company should be consulted before ordering any type of lock device for your specific property.

Having reviewed these documents, please provide and forward the required information. Should you have any questions, feel free to contact our office.

Sincerely,

M. S. Montgomery  
Fire Marshal

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following answers address some of the frequently asked questions regarding Harris County regulations of gated and non-gated multi-unit housing projects and gated subdivisions/communities in the unincorporated areas of Harris County. For a detailed explanation of all the requirements, standards and procedures, refer to the information packet that has been mailed to the project or on the Harris County website [www.hcfmo.net](http://www.hcfmo.net). If your project did not receive such a packet, please contact our office at 281-436-8030 and one will be mailed to you.

### GENERAL

Q: What authority does Commissioners Court have to require standards regarding emergency vehicle access to and building identification of multi-unit housing (apartment, town home and condominium) projects, gated subdivisions and communities?

A: Local Government Code Sections 352.111 thru 352.120 allow commissioners court of a county to adopt regulations and set standards regarding vehicular or pedestrian gates and building identification. Those projects required to comply shall be inspected and approved by the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office.

Q: How do I schedule an inspection?

A: Install the required signs and protected switches as noted in the information packet. Complete the required documentation described in the information packet. Mail or deliver the documentation to the Fire Marshal's office along with the inspection fee. An inspector will call you within 15 working days to schedule an inspection of the project.

Q: What is the cost for the inspection?

A: \$50 payable by **cash, cashiers check or money order. No company or personal checks.**

Q: What is the mailing address for the Fire Marshal's Office?

A: 2318 Atascocita, Humble, TX 77396 or 7701 Wilshire Place, Houston, TX 77040.

Q: If the project does not pass the inspection initially, can it be re-inspected?

A: Yes. The cost is \$25 and payable in the same manner. If the project still does not pass inspection, a Fire Marshal's Order may be issued - a violation of which is a Class B Misdemeanor with a maximum fine of \$1500.

Q: Are any projects grandfathered under the code?

A: No. All existing and newly constructed projects must comply by October 1, 2003.

### GATES & DRIVEWAYS

Q: If the project does not have access gates, does it still have to be inspected?

A: Yes. The regulations regarding building unit number/letter signage still apply. The costs and penalties are the same. (Refer to the section on **Building Identification**)

Q: What are the gate requirements?

A: At least one designated gate entrance meeting the standards is required. The minimum width of the vehicular gate must be a 14-foot clear opening width. The driveway must be a minimum of 28 feet wide to allow for entrance and egress. This entry must be free and clear of obstructions, which may entail the repositioning of card readers, telephone entry devices or remote control devices. Such equipment may be installed within the curbside area. If a concrete island, where a reader or entry device is located, separates the 28-foot driveway, a 12.6-foot clearance in both directions is permissible. All vehicular gates are required to have emergency vehicle accessibility. It is required to install a Knox locking device for emergency vehicle access to all vehicular gates. Accessibility can be achieved by a lockbox (911 box) at all times must contain a key, card, code or an electronic switch to open the gate or a cable mechanism that overrides the key, card, code or electronic switch that normally opens the gate and allows the gate to be opened manually. An electronic key switch can be installed at the key pad location. All electronic gate operators require a manual override to be installed.

Q: What about pedestrian gates that control access to a building?

A: This type of gate must also afford emergency personnel ready access to all units in each building. (Refer to the section on **Emergency Access Activation Point & Locks**)

Q: What are the requirements for pedestrian gate accessibility?

A: Only one (1) existing pedestrian gate which is nearby or in the vicinity of a vehicular gate is required to have a Knox locking device for emergency access.

Q: If the project wishes to have new gates installed or needs to have existing gate(s) altered to meet the requirements, can you recommend a gate company?

A: No. The property owner should be familiar with the gate company that installed the existing gates. If not, several gate companies with expertise in this area are listed in the phone book. Apartment association groups may be able to recommend a gate company.

Q: How far from the roadway does the one designated gate have to be located?

A: The distance from the road to the gate shall be no less than 30 feet. This allows for sufficient turn radii and protection for emergency vehicles from roadway traffic.

## EMERGENCY ACCESS ACTIVATION POINT (EAAP) & LOCKS

Q: What is an EAAP?

A: This is a protected switch approved by the Fire Marshal in the form of a key switch, padlock or lock box. It is in a designated location and readily available to emergency response personnel. It shall not exceed 5 feet in height and must be easily accessible from outside the vehicle or pedestrian access gate.

Q: Are all locked access gates required to have a Fire Marshal's approved protected switch or manual pull?

A: Yes, as emergency personnel may need to access the property from more than one gated location.

Q: What if my project already has padlocks, key switches or lock boxes on the access gates? And some of these locks are KNOX locks.

A: All existing padlocks and key switches must be changed out to afford access to emergency response personnel countywide. Existing boxes secured with a padlock only need not be changed. The padlock securing the box, however, must be changed.

Q: How much do these key switches, padlocks or lock boxes cost?

A: Protected switches must be purchased from the KNOX Company only. The company can be reached at 1-800-552-5669 or online at [www.knoxbox.com./store](http://www.knoxbox.com./store) Prices range from \$79-\$90 for padlocks or key switches and \$180-\$310 for lock boxes. Shipping and handling is extra.

Q: How do I order these key switches, padlocks, lock boxes and who installs them?

A: KNOX BOX forms can be obtained from the Fire Marshal's office by phone, fax, in person or you may order products on-line at [www.knoxbox.com](http://www.knoxbox.com) . Select a product from the left column, enter your zip code, select **Harris Co Fire Marshal Office** as your Fire Department. Proceed to order your Knox locking devices. Prior to ordering, you may want to contact an access gate company before ordering any device to ensure proper installation. After placing the order, the protected switch(es) should arrive in 2-3 weeks. Lock boxes and key switches will require professional gate company installation. After the boxes or switches are mounted, contact your local volunteer fire department. Fire department personnel will make arrangements to meet you at the project and secure-lock the boxes, key switches and any of the required padlocks.

Q: Who will have keys to these locks?

A: Initially, only firefighters and emergency medical personnel responding to calls for service will have key access. No keys will be provided to access gate companies, project personnel or property owners. Selected law enforcement patrol personnel will be issued keys at a later date. Keys will be issued through a key coordinator with the Fire Marshal's office only and a strict accountability program will be enforced.

## BUILDING IDENTIFICATION

Q: What type of signage for each building is required?

A: The sign must display the individual number/letter of the building and the range of unit numbers within the respective building. It must be easily visible from the vehicular driving areas on the project. There is no required sign size but the letters and/or numbers must be at least four inches high and in a contrasting color compared to the building.

Q: Do the signs have to be replaced if the buildings already have numbers/letters showing what unit numbers are in each building?

A: No, not if the signs meet the criteria as mentioned above.

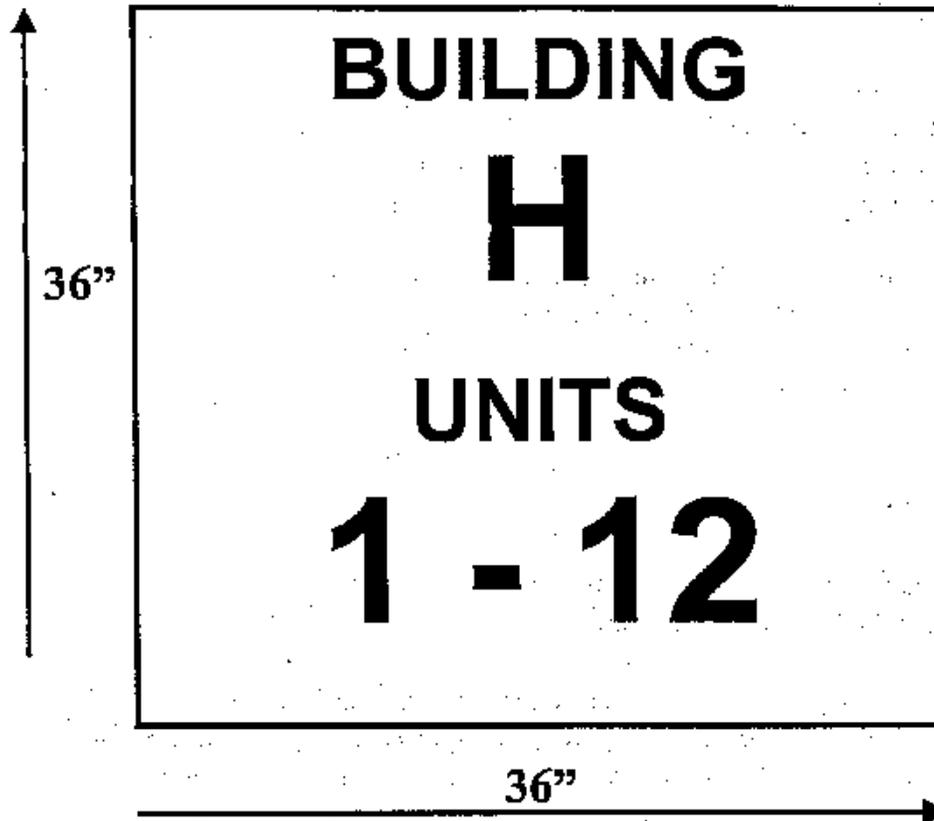
Q: Any other signage recommendations?

A: Yes. The signs should be of weather-resistive material and placed at either the ends or corners of the buildings, as long as they are visible from driving areas. A black background with white, light reflective letters is easily seen in low-light conditions.

## **Building Identification – Detailed information and diagram**

Emergency response agencies must be able to view and identify specific buildings and unit numbers under daylight, night, and inclement weather conditions. It is recommended that lighted signs be considered for viewing in low light conditions. The Fire Marshal's Office is the final authority on the approval of building identification signs.

1. Each residential building in a multi-unit housing project will have a sign depicting the number or letter of the respective building in a contrasting color compared to the building. Recommended colors are white, light-reflective letters/numbers on a black background to enhance visibility.
2. Each identification sign shall depict the individual unit number and/or letter, or the range of unit numbers or letters, within the respective building.
3. Each identification sign shall be easily seen from the vehicular driving areas by a responding emergency agency.
4. As a recommendation, each identification sign shall be a minimum of 36 inches high and 36 inches wide. The letters and/or numbers shall be a minimum of 4 inches high. This is a performance-based standard that may be modified by the Fire Marshal's Office to achieve the stated goals of this standard. Existing signage may meet the requirements of this rule.
5. An example of a recommended building identification sign follows:



#### Section 4. Permit Procedures

- A. The FMO Multi-Unit Gate and Building Identification Permit Application form must be submitted to the FMO and must include a letter of explanation, drawings or plans and application fee.
- B. The permit fee for multi-unit housing gates and signage shall be \$50.00 per complex.
- C. The explanation letter shall include the following:
1. Address of the property
  2. Key Map location
  3. Name of the property or complex
  4. Contact or manager name
  5. Phone number and email address (if available)
  6. Summary description of the work to be approved
  7. Location and type of gates used (automatic, sliding/retracting, manual etc.)
  8. Location and operation of the manual override or fail-safe system
  9. Location of the EAAP
  10. Description of building identification signage including proposed background and letter colors
  11. Any other significant information
- D. A drawing plan or understandable sketch of the gates/entry shall also be submitted and include the following:
1. Overall drawing of the primary entrance gates
  2. Width of the gates
  3. Type of gate operation (swing, slide etc.) and the direction of operation
  4. Distance from public road to the gate(s)
  5. Location of the reader/gate control panel (card reader, key pad, telephone entry, etc.) and measurements in relation to gates and public road
  6. Location of EAAP and measurements in relation to reader/gate control panel and gates
  7. Location of manual override or fail-safe system and measurements in relation to EAAP reader/gate control panel, gates and public road
  8. Location of devices that operates vehicular gates by means of pulleys, arms, chains etc.
- E. An on-site inspection of the entry system and signage will be scheduled and provided by the HCFMO after review of submitted information. A permit will be provided upon successful compliance. *A new permit must be obtained before a change in the gated Multi-Unit Housing Project's construction, location, or ownership that affects emergency response access or building identification.*

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  - 11) Any other significant information
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  - 5) Location of the reader/gate control panel (card reader, key pad, telephone entry, etc.) and measurements in relation to gates and public road
  - 6) Location of EAAP and measurements in relation to reader/gate control panel and gates
  - 7) Location of manual override or fail-safe system and measurements in relation to EAAP reader/gate control panel, gates and public road
  - 8) Location of devices that operates vehicular gates by means of pulleys, arms, chains etc.
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**SAMPLE LETTER OF PROPERTY DESCRIPTION**

**Winchester Chateaux Gated Apartment  
13212 Golden Drive  
Houston, TX. 77070**

December 24, 2005

Harris County Fire Marshal's Office  
2318 Atascocita Road  
Humble, TX. 77396

Concerning Gated Apartment Inspections:

Enclosed you will find the application for a Fire and Life Safety Inspection and a check in the amount of \$50.00.

**Address of property:** 13212 Golden Drive; Houston, TX. 77070

**Key map location:** 368Y

**Name of property:** Winchester Chateaux

**Management company name:** Crest Management

**Contact name:** Jane Doe (Property Manager)

**Phone:** 555-555-5555

**Description of work to be approved:** Inspection of the entry gates, EAAP devices, locks and entrance driveways.

**Location and type of gates used:** Code Entry Sliding/or Retracting Cantilever Gate, No Code Required Exit Sliding/or Retracting Cantilever Gate, and all other gates are chained and/or Knox Padlock Swinging Gates. All of the gates measure from at least 14 feet to 14 feet 5 inches with the curb-to-curb measurements of 26 feet 9.5 inches. Refer to sketch attached.

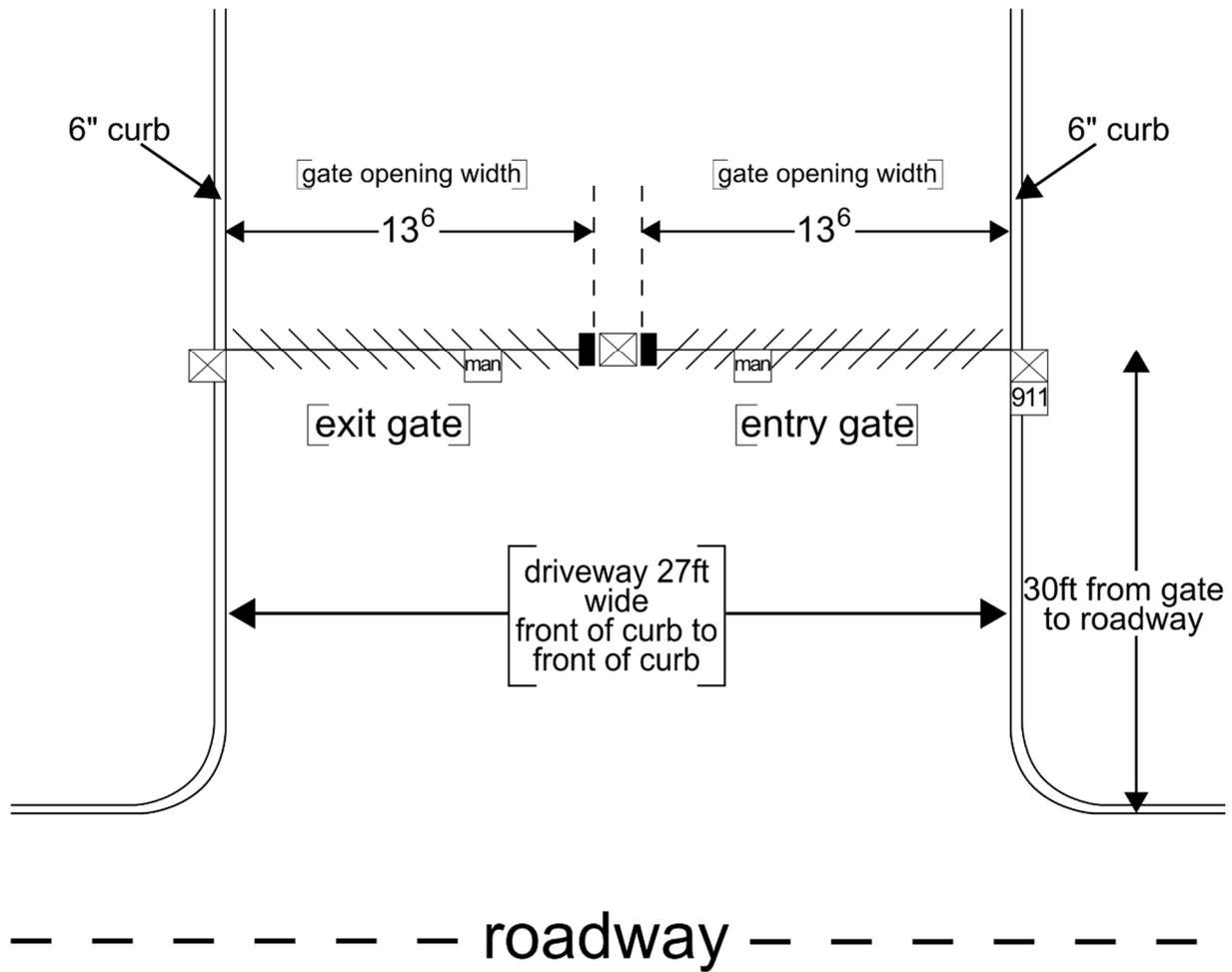
**Location and operation of manual override systems:** Opening the lock and the box mounted on the gate and pulling the cord to break the chain can open the gates due to power failures.

**Location of EAAP:** The EAAP is located in the entrance gate driveway, approximately 79 feet 8 inches from Golden Drive, approximately 15 inches from the Cantilever gate, 13 feet from the gate access keypad, on the left side, and mounted on a pole 5 feet from the ground.

**Description of building identification:** Each building is clearly marked with signs that are 24 inches wide and 36 inches tall. The background is dark green with 5 inch high numbers in white. The sign shows the building number located above the unit numbers in that building.

**Any other significant information:** None

Sincerely,



Sample of combination  
exit/entry gates\* and  
designated driveway  
diagram

**Legend**

|   |  |   |     |   |  |              |
|---|--|---|-----|---|--|--------------|
|  | 6" post  |  | man | manual override cable box with padlock (or knox lock) |  | sliding gate |
|  | "911" box with switch - secured by knox padlock (key to manual override lock inside) |   |     |   |  |              |

\*electronically controlled access gates

**Step-by-Step Procedures  
For  
Gated Apartment, Town Home or Condominium**

- STEP 1 -** Review the instruction packet. Also refer to drawings, examples and pictures on the Fire Marshal's website.
- STEP 2 -** Request and obtain an inspection application. You may order the Knox locking device(s) on the Knox website at [www.knoxbox.com](http://www.knoxbox.com). Please see "Frequently Asked Questions" to receive step by step instructions to order your locks.
- STEP 3 -** Consider consulting an access gate company before ordering any KNOX device. Order and include payment for the appropriate number and type of device(s) from the KNOX company directly.
- STEP 4 -** Prominently display the required building identification signs.
- STEP 5 -** Upon receipt of the devices from KNOX, about 2-3 weeks following the received order, install all the devices.
- STEP 6 -** Prepare and compile the required documents itemized in Section 4 of the instruction packet. Provide it to the inspector on the date the inspection is conducted. Failure to do so will result in inspection disapproval and necessitate a second inspection and fee.
- STEP 7 -** Call your local Volunteer Fire Department to schedule a visit. Fire personnel will make arrangements to secure-lock your KNOX devices and padlocks.
- STEP 8 -** Return the completed inspection application with the required fee.
- STEP 9 -** Upon receiving the application, a fire inspector from the Fire Marshal's Office will call within 15 working days to schedule an inspection date.
- STEP 10 -** On date of the inspection, provide the required documentation to the fire inspector. The inspector will drive and walk the property to ensure proper building signage. Upon completion, a compliant or non-compliant letter (stating any corrective action necessary) will be issued.



**HCFMO**  
Harris County Fire Marshal

(Office Use Only)

Form Name: FMP11A Receipt: \_\_\_\_\_

Form Date: 2/9/2015 Entered By: \_\_\_\_\_

## Fire and Life Safety Commercial Business Inspection Application

Please mail or deliver this completed application form and payment. Payment must be exact cash, Money Order, or Cashier's Check. No personal or company checks accepted. Make fees payable to Harris County Fire Marshal's Office. No refunds will be permitted once the application has been received.

**\*Required Fields – Your application will be returned to you if any of these are left blank.**

### Facility Information

Facility Name\*: \_\_\_\_\_ Key Map: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Address\*: \_\_\_\_\_ City\*: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip\*: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person\*: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone\*: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Application Instructions

Your application packet should include:

- This application, filled out entirely
- The appropriate fee and payment type

### Fee Schedule

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| Commercial Establishment                       | <b>\$260</b>   |
| Gated & Non-Gated Community/Multi-Unit Housing | <b>\$50</b>    |
| Private School                                 | <b>\$260</b>   |
| Temporary Food Vendor                          | <b>\$260</b>   |
| Occupancy Load (add on)                        | <b>+\$50</b>   |
| Other Inspections                              | <b>\$50/hr</b> |

### **Walk-ins accepted in both locations:**

Harris County Fire Marshal's Office  
7701 Wilshire Place  
Houston, TX 77040

Harris County Fire Marshal's Office  
2318 Atascocita Rd  
Humble, TX 77396

**It may take up to two weeks between the date we receive completed application and inspection!**

If you submit or alter any of this application or HCFMO document with false information, you may be charged with tampering with a government document, under Texas Penal Code 37.10 TAMPERING WITH GOVERNMENTAL RECORD.