



Code Requirements for Life Safety and Fire Protection

by Robert J. Sikorski

The Life Safety Code addresses those construction, protection, and occupancy features necessary to minimize danger to life, including smoke, heat, and toxic gases created during a fire. First a small history; the code requirements come from the building and Life Safety Code 101. The Life Safety Code was formerly known as the Building Exits Code. The NFPA 101: Life Safety Code appeared in Florida in 1985, but was not adopted into law by the state of Florida until 1988.

In 1988 the state found it necessary to have laws or codes to protect much of the population that had already retired to Florida and were

living in existing buildings without any life safety or fire protection. The codes were necessary to address new and existing buildings because life safety is important to protect everyone. The Life Safety Code has usually been upgraded on a three-year cycle since 1985.

Most of our regulations today come from the Florida Fire Prevention Code, 2007 edition that has the 2006 edition Life Safety Code incorporated and was effective December 31, 2008. This is the bible that the fire department and building department use for guidelines for the safety of Florida residents. There are many chapters, but many of the condominiums fall under chapter 31, which is existing apartment buildings.

The Life Safety Code comes from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA); an important note is that the NFPA committee is made up of a group of highly qualified individuals who have demonstrated knowledge and competence in the design and construction of buildings and structures, in the manufacture and testing of building components and accessories, and in the enforcement of regulations pertaining to life safety from fire and other perils encountered in building structures.

In 1988 chapters 18 and 19 of the Life Safety Code covered new and existing apartments, and it is now chapter 31. Very important is the definition of an apartment building in 1988 as any building with three or more living units with independent cooking and bathroom facilities, whether designated as

apartment house, tenement, garden apartment, or by any other name. This is the same definition today.

Under the Detection, Alarm, and Communication Systems section, apartment buildings with more than three stories or more than eleven living units shall be provided with a fire alarm system; this system was required to be initiated by a manual fire alarm pull station. These requirements were still the same for existing buildings in both the Florida Fire Prevention and Life Safety Code, 2007 edition and were being enforced through most jurisdictions in Florida for the past 22 years.

However the State Senate Bill 1196, which was just recently signed into law by Governor Charlie Crist, made a special provision that apartment buildings or condominiums less than four stories with exterior corridors would be exempt from installing fire alarms. This means that existing buildings with interior means of egress with more than 11 units will need a fire alarm, and the building with exterior means of egress will be exempt from that Code requirement.

Smoke Alarms

The requirement for smoke alarms that was in the 1985 Life Safety Code has not changed and is still required today for all existing apartments and condominiums. This requirement comes from Chapter 31.3.4.5.1 Existing Apartment Buildings, Fire Prevention Code 2007 edition.

In buildings other than those equipped with an existing, complete automatic smoke detection system, approved single-station smoke alarms (smoke detectors) shall be required to be installed outside every sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of the bedrooms and on all levels of the dwelling unit.

Note the smoke detector is required to be hard wired from the household current or a system smoke detector can be used as long as it operates to function in the same manner as single-station or multiple-station smoke alarm. On smoke detectors that are wired to 110 volt household current in service without secondary (standby) power source shall be permitted.

Smoke Alarms Save Lives

It is very important to note that the elected representative of the building or building manager is to some degree responsible for making sure that the life safety requirements for the building occupants are met.

The best way to achieve this goal is to speak to the local fire code official in your jurisdiction. I found in the past twenty-five years that the local Fire Marshal is usually proactive and helpful in achieving a code compliant building and getting his requirements in writing is always best.

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