

Special Edition of Code Corner

Haunted Houses

Code Question:

Does the Ohio Fire Code prohibit the creation of Haunted Houses within existing structures?

Answer: NO

During the month of October, while fire code officials are busy with fire prevention week activities, the local “ghosts” and “ghouls” are often busy creating their version of a “Haunted House”. While these gruesome attractions may be immensely popular, the fire code official is keenly aware that they are by design intended to distract and disorient the patrons seeking such Halloween fun. These facilities are often temporary structures constructed of readily available materials and lack the necessary fire protection and life safety safeguards required to provide a minimally acceptable level of fire safety. The fire code official might discover such a facility and even find that the entire construction process occurred without input or oversight of a design professional or building code official. The very nature of the facility provides significant fire safety challenges and these may be exacerbated when the facility was constructed without proper plans, permits, and approvals. Although the Ohio Fire Code does not contain specific requirements prohibiting the creation of a “haunted house”, a number of fire code provisions may be applicable to the prevailing conditions. The fire code official would typically evaluate the situation with respect to use and occupancy classifications, change of use and occupancy, fire protection, means of egress, occupant load, fire detection and alarm notification, combustibility of decorative materials, exit lights, emergency lighting, and emergency procedures.



A request for Code Enforcement assistance can be directed to the **SFM Code Enforcement Bureau** via the fire marshal web site. For fire code questions, contact the **Code Enforcement Bureau** technical staff at (614) 728-5460.

Code References—(2005 Ohio Fire Code):

OAC 1301:7-7-01 (E)(1)(a)(ii), Ohio Fire Code § 105.1.1.2 Discretionary permits: “The local fire code official is authorized, but not required, to establish a permit program and issue a permit for the hazardous activities set forth in the appendix to this rule. Appendix: A) Operational permits. (A)(1)(b)(A01.1.2) Amusement buildings. An operational permit to operate a special amusement building.

OAC 1301:7-7-01 (E)(1)(a)(iii), Ohio Fire Code § 105.1.1.3 Notification of hazardous activities: “When a permit is not required to engage in any hazardous activity set forth in the appendix to this rule, the person intending to engage in the hazardous activity shall first notify the local fire code official of that person’s intent to engage in that hazardous activity. Appendix: A) Operational permits. (A)(1)(b)(A01.1.2) Amusement buildings. An operational permit to operate a special amusement building.

OAC 1301:7-7-01 (E)(3)(c), Ohio Fire Code § 105.3.3 Occupancy: “Prior to the issuance by the building official of any certificate of occupancy for any building subject to paragraph (D)(2)(a)(104.2.1) of this rule, the responsible person shall notify the fire code official to be present to witness the acceptance testing of all fire protection systems. Prior to the issuance by the building official of any certificate of occupancy for any building subject to paragraph (D)(2)(a)(104.2.1) of this rule, the responsible person shall notify the fire code official to conduct a final inspection. The fire code official shall report any deficiencies of the fire protection systems to the building official. No structure or building, or any portion thereof, shall be occupied unless: 105.3.3.1. Such structures or buildings or portions thereof are in substantial compliance with the applicable provisions of this code and the building code as listed in rule 1301:7-7-45 of the Administrative Code; or 105.3.3.2 The structure or building, or any portion thereof, does not constitute a distinct hazard to life and property in accordance with the provisions of this code.”

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OAC 1301:7-7-02 (B), Ohio Fire Code § 202 General Definitions: “***Special amusement building.** A building that is temporary, permanent or mobile that contains a device or system that conveys passengers or provides a walkway along, around or over a course in any direction as a form of amusement arranged so that the egress path is not readily apparent due to visual or audio distractions or an intentionally confounded egress path, or is not readily available because of the mode of conveyance through the building or structure.” (emphasis added)*

OAC 1301:7-7-09 (G)(2)(k), Ohio Fire Code § 907.2.11 Special amusement buildings: “An approved automatic smoke detection system shall be provided in special amusement buildings in accordance with this paragraph.

Exception: In areas where ambient conditions will cause a smoke detection system to alarm, an approved alternative type of automatic detector shall be installed.

- (i) 907.2.11.1 **Alarm. Activation** of any single **smoke detector, the automatic sprinkler system** or any other automatic fire detection device **shall immediately sound an alarm** at the building at a constantly attended location from which emergency action can be initiated, including the capability of manual initiation of requirements in paragraph (G)(2)(k)(ii)(907.2.11.2) of this rule.
- (ii) 907.2.11.2 **System response.** The **activation** of two or more **smoke detectors**, a single smoke detector with alarm verification, **the automatic sprinkler system** or other approved fire detection device **shall automatically:**
 - a. **Cause illumination** of the means of egress with light of not less than 1 foot-candle (11 lux) at the walking surface level;
 - b. **Stop** any conflicting or confusing sounds and **visual distractions**; and
 - c. **Activate** an approved directional **exit marking** that will become apparent in an emergency.
Such system response shall also include **activation of a prerecorded message**, clearly audible throughout the special amusement building, instructing patrons to proceed to the nearest exit. Alarm signals used in conjunction with the prerecorded message shall produce a sound which is distinctive from other sounds used during normal operation.
The wiring to the auxiliary devices and equipment used to accomplish the above fire safety functions shall be monitored for integrity in accordance with NFPA 72 as listed in rule 1301:-7-7-45 of the Administrative Code.
- (iii) 907.2.11.3 **Emergency voice/alarm communication system.** An emergency voice/alarm communication system, which is also allowed to serve as a public address system, shall be installed in accordance with NFPA 72 as listed in rule 1301:7-7-45 of the Administrative Code and be audible throughout the entire special amusement building.” **[emphasis added]**