



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



FIRE PROTECTION & LIFE SAFETY SYSTEM IMPAIRMENT

In the life of any building, there will be times when fire protection, detection, and life safety systems are inoperable. The cause may be planned or unplanned. Planned outages include routine inspection, testing, or maintenance; system upgrades or extensions; or contractor work. Unplanned outages may result from fire damage, equipment failure, lightning strikes, vandalism, or delayed repairs.

Whatever the cause, building owners, managers, and occupants have specific legal obligations and best-practice responsibilities when a fire protection or life safety system is impaired or out of service. Failure to act appropriately can expose occupants to serious risk and building owners to significant legal and regulatory liability.

NFPA 25 defines an impairment as: *"A condition where a fire protection system or unit, or portion thereof, is out of order, and the condition can result in the fire protection system or unit not functioning in a fire event."* It applies to all required fire protection and life safety systems, including:

- Automatic fire sprinkler and standpipe systems
- Fire pumps, fire water supply and fire department connections (FDCs)
- Fire suppression systems (clean agent, CO₂, foam, dry chemical)
- Fire alarm and detection systems and emergency notification/mass notification systems

When a required fire protection or life safety system is out of service, the following actions are legally required under the NJ Fire Code:

Action 1 – Notify the Local Fire Department: Fire departments preplan buildings; when a sprinkler system is out of service, apparatus positioning and tactical plans must be adjusted.

Action 2 – Notify the Local Fire Official: The Fire Official is the link between the community and the fire department and has authority to order additional protective measures, including fire watch or evacuation, if the impairment constitutes an imminent hazard.

Action 3 – Notify Occupants of impairment, restricted activities and alternative alerting procedures:

- OSHA prohibits hot work (welding, oxyacetylene cutting, etc.) when water-based fire protection systems are impaired.
- Candles and space heaters

Action 4 – Post Warning Signs: Post signs at the fire department connection (FDC) and at main sprinkler control valves indicating that the system is out of service. This alerts responding firefighters and prevents them from relying on a system that is not operational.

The Fire Official may order a fire watch or evacuation until the system is restored to service.

NFPA Standard 25 Water-Based Fire Protection Systems and NFPA Standard 72 Fire Alarm and Signaling Systems offer the following additional best practices:

- The property owner should designate an Impairment Coordinator responsible for: authorizing preplanned impairments before systems are taken out of service; ensuring impairment procedures are followed; overseeing notifications, fire watch implementation, and system restoration; and verifying impairment tags are placed and removed properly.
- Property owners should have a written Impairment Program for various fire and life-safety system partial or full impairment. A Fire Protection & Life Safety Impairment Program is available on [MSI Model Policies](#).
- Impairment Program should describe how a fire watch will be maintained for extended impairment periods.
- Restore the system to service as promptly as possible. Notify all parties when the system is restored.
- Maintain records of each impairment event, including the type of impairment, affected systems and areas, start/end times, cause, corrective actions, and notifications made.

There may be local variations for required actions as provided for by the Fire Official or Fire Inspector. The owners of public buildings are encouraged to contact their local authority having jurisdiction to verify that their policies and procedures follow regulations.