

# Code Compliance

— guidelines on Seattle regulations governing safety and quality of life

## Unsafe and Vacant Buildings:

- **DPD's Inspection Program**
- **SFD's Inspection Program**

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The following information was prepared by the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) and the Seattle Fire Department (SFD), and is intended to provide general information about the two departments' programs. For more specific information, please contact DPD staff at 615-0808.

### Reporting Unsafe Structures

DPD inspectors will respond to complaints regarding buildings with suspected structural problems. Anyone aware of such a building should report it to the property owner, if possible, and then to DPD by calling DPD's Violation Complaint Line at (206) 615-0808. A complaint should be as specific as possible in order for the inspector to reasonably assess the situation. In an emergency, call 911 for the Seattle Fire Department.

Once a complaint is received, a DPD inspector will be sent to the reported location to evaluate the condition of the structure. In some cases the inspector may determine that further review by the owner's structural engineer is warranted. If the building or a portion of a building is found to be an imminent danger to life or property, DPD will require the property owner to secure the structure immediately and take measures to rectify the dangerous condition.

### DPD's Vacant Building Inspection Program

Vacant buildings are potential problems for any neighborhood. In addition to the unsightliness of a boarded up building, vacant buildings tend to attract illegal dumping, transient camping, graffiti and illegal activi-

ties such as drug dealing. DPD works closely with the Seattle/King County Health Department, the Seattle Fire Department, and the Seattle Police Department, to identify and coordinate an effective response to serious vacant building problems. If you have questions about a vacant building or would like more information, please call the DPD inspector at (206) 615-0808 during business hours.

It is not illegal for a building to be vacant. However, there are certain standards that must be followed to ensure the building remains closed to unauthorized entry. DPD will inspect to make sure that the premises are safe; that exterior stairs, porches and yard areas are maintained; and that steps are taken to prevent the building from deteriorating.

When an inspector observes that a vacant building is in violation of vacant building standards, every effort is made to obtain voluntary compliance to correct the violations. If an owner fails to correct violations voluntarily, a Notice of Violation will be issued. Although an inspector may suspect interior violations, such violations may not be identified during an inspection since inspectors do not have the authority to enter buildings without the owner's permission.

If an owner fails to correct the identified violations, DPD may make arrangements to have a building secured against unauthorized entry. Either action requires additional time and documentation. You can obtain information concerning a specific building and DPD's actions regarding that building by contacting DPD.

If a building is determined to be unfit for human habitation or other use (see Seattle Municipal Code [SMC] 22.208 for more information concerning conditions that may cause a building to be declared unfit). DPD will issue a Director's Complaint identifying the conditions that cause the building to be unfit, and the owner will be directed to "repair" or, in some cases, "repair or demolish" the building. If the owner fails to correct the violation the City may file a civil penalties action seeking to fine the owner for failing to correct the violations. In some cases the City may be authorized to repair or demolish the structure and bill the owner for the cost of repairs or demolition.

[www.seattle.gov/dpd](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd)

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### **SFD's Building Inspection Program**

Firefighters inspect every occupied commercial building annually or biennially, depending on the use of the building. Multifamily residential buildings, schools, and hospitals are also included in this inspection program. The walk-through inspection covers all portions of each building except the interior of private dwelling units. The inspector checks for fire code violations such as general fire hazards, blocked or hindered egress, the use of special processes that may require permits, proper installation of fire systems, and changes in use of the building that might require that special precautions be observed or permits obtained.

If violations are found, they are noted and a copy given to the owner or responsible person with a time frame (generally two weeks) in which the violations are to be corrected. Any items that are DPD related are referred to DPD. At the end of the time period allotted, a reinspection takes place. If the violation has not been corrected, the violation is forwarded to the Fire Marshal's Office (FMO) to initiate action for compliance. A fee will be charged if an inspector from the FMO has to reinspect the premises.

### **SFD's Vacant Building Inspection Program**

Firefighters annually inspect all known vacant commercial and residential buildings. The purpose of the inspection is to ensure that the building is secured against illegal entry, that hazardous conditions such as holes in walls or flooring are covered and secured, that combustible materials are removed, and that the building address is clearly posted. Such inspections are important, since vacant buildings are frequently the target of arson or fires started by persons who have illegally gained entry into a building.

## **Access to Information**

Links to electronic versions of DPD **Client Assistance Memos (CAMs)**, **Director's Rules**, and the **Seattle Municipal Code** are available on the "Publications" and "Codes" pages of our website at [www.seattle.gov/dpd](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd). Paper copies of these documents, as well as additional regulations mentioned in this CAM, are available from our Public Resource Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave. in downtown Seattle, (206) 684-8467.