

# Procedures for the Use of Commercial Tents and Tents Over 10 X 10

The following guidelines are based on the requirements of the University of Houston Fire Prevention Code (NFPA 1 Uniform Fire Code) and NFPA 101 Life Safety Code as adopted by the State of Texas. Assistance in using these guidelines and meeting the requirements of the aforementioned codes is available from the Department of Public Safety (DPS) Fire Marshal's Office.

Fire Marshal's Office (713) 743-1635  
FAX (713) 743-5169  
3869 Wheeler St.  
Houston, Texas 77204

## **Inspection**

- The DPS Fire Marshal's Office may inspect any tent to determine compliance with the NFPA Life Safety Code and the University of Houston Fire Prevention Code.
- Any violations of the University of Houston Fire Prevention Code must be corrected prior to the use of the tent, or immediately if discovered during the event.
- In order to comply with the requirements of the University's Fire Prevention Code, it is necessary for the DPS Fire Marshal's Office to make certain approvals as noted in these guidelines.

## **Flame Resistance and Structure**

- All tent fabric must be flame resistant.
- A certificate or other proof of approval by a testing laboratory is acceptable as evidence of the required fire resistance. A copy of the certificate must be provided to the DPS Fire Marshal's Office upon request. These certificates should be available from the tent supplier.
- Tent suppliers must be able to certify that tents have been erected in accordance with manufacturer recommendations, industry standards, and code requirements.
- All parts of the tent must be secured together by bolts, pins or clips.

## **Floor Coverings**

- The area enclosed by any tent and not less than 10 feet outside of such tent, must be cleared of all flammable or combustible material or vegetation prior to erecting the tent. The premises must be kept free from such flammable or combustible materials during the period for which the area is used.

- No hay, straw, shavings, or similar combustible materials are permitted within any tent unless they have been treated to make them flame retardant. A certificate or other proof of approval by a testing laboratory indicating that the material has been properly treated is acceptable as evidence. A copy of certificates must be provided to the Department of Public Safety, Fire Marshal's Office prior to placing the material within a tent. These certificates are available from the material manufacturer or supplier.

## Exits and Occupant Load for Enclosed Tents

- Tents that have sides attached and rolled up are capable of being enclosed and must meet these requirements even if it is intended for the tent to remain unenclosed during the event.
- The number of separate exits required for enclosed tents is based on the floor area of the tent. The maximum number of occupants, called the occupant load, is also based on the floor area of the tent.

<u>Occupant Load (floor area of tent)</u>	<u>Number of Exits (minimum)</u>
49 (343 sq ft) or less	1
Between 50 (350 sq ft) and 499 (3,493 sq ft)	2
Between 500 (3,500 sq ft) and 999 (6,993 sq ft)*	3
1000 or more (7,000 sq ft)	4 or more

- The occupant load is decreased when tables and chairs are used (banquet style) - the number of required exits remains the same because exits are based on floor area. The following calculation will determine the occupant load with tables and chairs:

$$\text{net square footage of tent floor area} / 15 = \text{occupant load with tables and chairs}$$

Example: The number of occupants allowed, with tables and chairs, in a 50'X50' tent with a 10'X20' stage.

$$2,500 \text{ square feet (floor area)} - 200 \text{ square feet (stage area)} / 15 = 153 \text{ persons}$$

Please Note: These calculations are for planning purposes only and do not represent a legal capacity. The DPS Fire Marshal's Office will provide legal capacities based on submitted set-up plans.

- Each exit must be provided with an exit sign. The word "EXIT" must be plainly legible in letters at least 6 inches high and with strokes not less than 3/4 inch wide. If the tent is to be occupied after sunset, emergency lighting must be provided. In most cases, the tent company can provide exit signs and emergency lighting.

## Exit Requirements for All Tents

- The minimum width of an exit must not be less than 32 inches.
- Guy wires or guy ropes must not cross an exit at a height of less than 7 feet.
- Where tents are placed near fences or other obstructions, a clear exit path must be maintained to an area sufficiently away from the tent.
- Tent stakes must be railed off, capped, or covered.

## **Fire Protection**

- One portable fire extinguisher (dry chemical ABC type) must be furnished at each exit of an enclosed tent. The sponsor for the event using the tent is responsible for ensuring that fire extinguishers are provided. If necessary, arrangements for portable fire extinguishers may be made by contacting the Fire Marshal's Office at 713-743-1635. This service is for University sponsored events only and the event sponsor is responsible for the extinguisher.
- Smoking is prohibited in any tent. "No Smoking" signs must be placed at every entrance.
- Open flames (including use of sterno and other food warming devices), and cooking equipment must be approved in advance by the DPS Fire Marshal's Office. A University of Houston Fire Marshal maybe required to be in attendance while an open flame device is in use.

## **Electrical**

- The electrical system and equipment must be isolated from the public by proper elevation or guarding. All electrical fuses and switches must be enclosed in approved enclosures. Cables on the ground in areas travel by the public must be placed in trenches or protected by approved covers (yellow jacket etc.).
- All electrical systems must be properly grounded (GFIC).
- Generators must be placed so that exhaust fumes do not enter tents and be at least 20 feet from tents or any other structure.
- Generators must use diesel as a fuel (No Gasoline).
- Generators must have a grounding rod attached to the generator.
- Electrical Installations must comply with the National Electrical code (NFPA 70). This is to include all circuits to have a GFIC before entering the tents.

## **Propane Heating Systems**

- Tanks shall be no closer than 10 feet to the tent.
- All propane tanks shall be labeled.
- All propane tanks shall be stored in the upright position.
- The heating system shall be installed in accordance with its listing.

## **Applicable Standards of the State Fire Prevention Code**

NFPA 1, *Fire Prevention Code*

NFPA 101, *Life Safety Code*

NFPA 102, *Standard for Grandstands, Folding and Telescopic Seating, Tents, and Membrane Structures*

NFPA 96, *Standard for Ventilation Control and Fire Protection of Commercial Cooking Operations*

NFPA 70, *National Electrical Code*

## **Insurance Requirement**

Outside groups are required to provide evidence of insurance by way of certificate of insurance that names the University of Houston as coinsured for the event. Certificates of insurance must be provided to the UM event sponsor and Environmental Health and Risk Management.