



CHARLOTTE FIRE DEPARTMENT

The City of Charlotte Fire Department preserves life and property through rapid emergency response, code enforcement, education, and planning.

Tent Guidelines and Permitting Requirements

The guidelines established herein are based on provisions of the North Carolina Fire Code. Any proposed alternative measures to the requirements below shall provide an equal level of safety and shall require prior approval of the fire official.

Permits:

The erection of any tent or canopy in **excess of 800 square feet** requires prior approval and an operational permit issued by the Charlotte Fire Department, Fire Prevention Bureau Office. Exceptions:

- Tents or canopies not exceeding 1,800 square feet that are open on all sides without sidewalls, drops or other physical obstructions on 75 percent or more of the perimeter.
- Tents or canopies used exclusively for camping or funeral services.

In addition, any **enclosed** tent with an occupant load of 50 or more persons shall require the submittal of a detailed site plan, indicating seating and table arrangements, location of any stage and other interior structures, and exit arrangements.

Access, Location and Parking:

- Fire apparatus access roads shall be a minimum of 20 feet, and roads shall not be obstructed in any manner, including the parking of vehicles.
- Tents shall not be located with-in 20 feet of lot lines, buildings, other tents or membrane structures, and internal combustion engines, with the following exceptions:
 1. Separation distances between tents and membrane structures NOT used for cooking is not required when aggregate floor area of the tents do not exceed 15,000 square feet;
 2. Tents need not be separated from buildings when ALL of the following conditions are met:
 - a. The aggregate floor area of the tent or membrane structure shall not exceed 10,000 square feet;
 - b. The aggregate area of the tent AND building shall not exceed the allowable floor area as indicated in the International Building Code.
 - c. Required exiting is maintained for both the tent and building, including travel distances.
 - d. Fire apparatus access roads are maintained.

- Tents with an area of 15,000 square feet or more shall not be located closer than 50 feet from any building or other tent, except with connecting corridors between multiple tents.
- Connecting corridors are allowed provided that an approved exit is located at each end of such corridor.
- A fire break or access of not less than 12 feet shall be maintained on all sides of tents, unless otherwise approved by the fire official.
- Tents shall be properly roped, braced and anchored to withstand the elements of weather and to guard against collapsing.

Means of Egress:

Means of egress from tents shall comply with the following:

- Exits shall be spaced at equal intervals as can be best accomplished.
- Any area of the tent shall be located within 100 feet of an exit.
- The required number and minimum width of exits shall be in accordance with the following:
 1. Occupant load (OL) 10 to 199: Minimum 2 exits, minimum 72 inches per exit.
 2. OL 200 to 499: Minimum 3 exits, 72 inches per exit.
 3. OL 500 to 999: Minimum 4 exits, 96 inches per exit.
 4. OL 1,000 to 1,999: Minimum 5 exits, 120 inches per exit; or 7 exits, 96 inches per exit.
 5. OL 2,000 to 2,999: Minimum 6 exits, 120 inches per exit; or 8 exits, 96 inches per exit.
 6. Over 3,000: Minimum 7 exits, 120 inches per exit; or 9 exits, 96 inches per exit. Note: For occupant loads exceeding 3,000, minimum exits shall be based on the total occupant load multiplied by 0.2 inches per person.
- Curtains over exit openings shall be of a color or colors that contrast the adjoining tent color, and curtains shall be on sliding metal supports, located a minimum of 80 inches above the floor surface. Curtains may be taped along edges with colored tape to achieve the contrast requirements stated above, if approved by the fire official.
- Exit doors, if required, shall open in the direction of travel.
- Proper aisle widths shall be maintained for theater-style seating. Consult with your fire inspector for further.
- Exit signs shall be clearly posted at each exit for tents serving an OL of 50 persons or more. Exit signs shall be either listed and labeled in accordance with UL 924 as the “internally illuminated” type, or externally illuminated in accordance with the following:
 1. For OL of 300 or less, two separate circuits, one of which is separate from all other circuits; or
 2. For OL of more than 300, two sources of power, one of which is an “emergency system” supplied by batteries or on-site generators, for a minimum of 90 minutes duration.
- Means of egress shall be illuminated at floor level during all times the tent is occupied. In most cases, the general lighting already available will satisfy this requirement.

Fire Protection Equipment:

- Portable dry chemical fire extinguishers with a minimum 2A-10BC rating shall be provided so that travel distance does not exceed 75 from any point to an extinguisher.
- Extinguishers shall have updated inspection tags (inspected annually) and shall be mounted on approved hangers. The hanging of extinguishers utilizing zip ties etc. is not acceptable.
- Certain use conditions (fireworks sales, etc.) may require pressurized water extinguishers in addition to the dry chemical type.

Cooking Tents:

- All cooking tents shall be provided with a Class K fire extinguisher.
- Heating or warming of food utilizing solid fuel burning materials (i.e. Sterno fuel cans) shall be approved provided such use is not within 10 feet of an exit or combustible materials.
- Cooking tents shall be separated from all other tents by a minimum of 20 feet.

Heating of Tents:

- Heating of tents shall be accomplished by forced air, with the heating equipment located outside. LP gas containers for heating shall be located as follows:
 1. Containers with a capacity of 500 gallons or less shall be located a minimum of 10 feet from tent.
 2. Containers with a capacity of greater than 500 gallons shall be located a minimum of 25 feet from tent.
 3. All hoses for LP tanks shall be protected from physical damage, and LP gas tank valves shall be fully accessible and closed when not in use.

General:

- Generators and other internal combustion power sources shall be located a minimum of 20 feet from tents, and protected from public contact by fencing, barricades, etc.
- Combustible decorative material is strictly prohibited and floor service and area surrounding the exterior of the tent up to 30 feet shall be free of combustible material that may present a fire hazard.
- Crowd managers shall be required at a ratio of 1 per 250 occupants.
- CFD stand-by personnel will be required for tents with an occupant load of 300 persons or more.

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