

Seattle Fire Prevention Division

220 3rd Avenue South

Seattle, WA 98104-2608 Email: permits@seattle.gov



Tents and Heaters for Outdoor Dining and Activities: SFD Safety and Permit Guidelines v12272024

Tents can be dangerous if they catch fire or collapse. For this reason, larger tents are regulated by the Fire and Building Codes. Heaters can also pose risks, whether the heat is provided by propane/Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), diesel, or electricity. This document presents a summary of code requirements as well as special streamlined permitting and rules in effect during the COVID pandemic and recovery.

TENTS

You need a Seattle Fire Department (SFD) permit for using a temporary tent, canopy, or air-supported structure if:

- The structure is bigger than 400 square feet and has one or more walls; OR,
- The structure is bigger than 700 square feet with no walls (roof-only canopies).
- You have two or more small roof-only tents that are placed side by side less than 12 feet apart and their total area is bigger than 700 square feet.

The permit includes conditions you must follow regarding tent materials and installation to comply with safety requirements in the fire code. The permit is good for 28 days. If your tent meets or exceeds the size limits above and will be used for longer than 28 days, after receiving your SFD temporary tent permit, you can contact the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections at 206-684-8850 for permitting. Awnings also require permits from SDCI and are not handled by SFD.

Make Sure Your Tent Can Be Approved by the Fire Marshal If you are purchasing a tent greater than 400 sq feet, please ensure that it meets flame retardant standards in the fire code (see permit condition #8 on the last page). You will be required to accept responsibility and liability for the proper installation of the tent per industry standards and/or manufacturer's installation instructions. Temporary tents should not be occupied during periods of snow or ice accumulation unless designed for full structural loading per the Seattle Building Code. Smaller tents should be removed during snow and ice accumulation and wind events. Tents rented through a reputable tent rental company will meet fire code standards and the tent company will assume liability for proper installation.

Should I Choose a Tent Without Walls? For ventilation reasons, during the pandemic, government restrictions sometimes required zero, one, two or more walls. You may wish to take this into consideration when purchasing or renting a tent, as it is unknown whether future variants will cause a return to these restrictions.

In addition, there are also fire code impacts of choosing a tent with or without walls: If your tent has no walls, you only need an SFD permit if your tent is larger than 700 square feet, or you have tents side by side closer than 12 feet apart with total area exceeding 700 square feet. However, if you add walls to your tent, then smaller tents will require an SFD permit, too. If your tent has any walls, a permit is required for tents 400 square feet or greater.

How Close to a Building Can a Tent be Installed? For example, Tents Covering Sidewalk Dining Tables SFD generally requires a set-back between tents and buildings of a minimum of 12 feet.

What are the Full Permit Conditions for a Temporary Tent? Please see the last page.

OUTDOOR HEATING AND LIGHTING

Propane (LPG) and Diesel-Fueled Heaters Require a Permit and Fuel Tanks are Not Allowed Inside Tents. This means "mushroom" heaters are allowed 10 feet away from tents, but are prohibited inside tents. "Salamander" style heaters

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which blow air in under a tent from the outside are permitted and are usually available from tent rental companies. The fuel tank must be a minimum 10 feet away from the tent and exits and you must have 3A 40BC fire extinguishers.

If you rent an LPG/propane or diesel heater from a tent rental company, that company will usually have the required SFD propane/diesel heater permit, and you will not need an additional permit. They should also provide required fire extinguishers. If you are purchasing your own LPG/propane or diesel heaters, you will need an SFD permit.

SFD issues a temporary Propane/LPG heating permit (permit code 8207) and a diesel permits (permit code 1102) to meet your different heating needs.

Electric Heaters and Lighting are allowed outside as well as inside tents and do not require a separate permit from SFD. However, they must be plugged into an approved electrical outlet.

For more information, please contact the SFD Permits Unit at permits@seattle.gov. Interpretation services are available. Please feel free to request a call with someone who speaks your language – just tell us which language and your phone number.

PERMIT CONDITIONS: SFD TEMPORARY TENT PERMITS

1. A 12-ft. wide “CLEAR AREA” shall be in place around the entire perimeter of the tent. There shall be no parking within 20 feet of the tent. (The perimeter of the tent includes the stakes used to support the structure. The “CLEAR AREA” shall be measured outward from the furthest stake.) The distance requirement may be waived or modified by a representative for SFD when topography is a limiting factor, waivers may be noted on the plan attached to the permit. Where the permit requirement is triggered by two or more small roof-only tents that are placed side by side less than 12 feet apart and their total area is bigger than 700 square feet, the “CLEAR AREA” applies to the space between permitted groups of roof-only tents. (21 SFC Sections 3103.8.1, 3103.8.2 & 3103.8.6)
2. A 20-ft. wide “FIRE DEPT. ACCESS LANE” shall be provided to access the tent structure. (21 SFC Section 503.2.1)
3. Minimum number and width of exits/egress ways shall be as listed on the chart below. Maximum travel distance to an exit shall be 100 ft. when inside the tent. (21 SFC Section 3103.12)

Occupant Load	Minimum # of exits	Minimum width of each exit
10 to 199	2	72
200 to 499	3	72
500 to 999	4	96
1,000 to 1,999	5	120
2,000 to 2,999	6	120
Over 3,000	7	120

4. Each exit shall be provided with a lighted ‘EXIT’ sign with letters at least 5 inches in height. (21 SFC Section 3103.12.6, 1013.6.1).
5. Provide one fire extinguisher rated a minimum of 2A for each 3,000 square feet of tent area. The location of each extinguisher shall be marked by signs, which are clearly visible. The maximum travel distance to any fire extinguisher within the tent shall be 50 ft. (21 SFC Section 3107.9)
6. Vehicles in the tent shall have their fuel tanks emptied and the battery cables disconnected – see full permit conditions for specifics. (21 SFC Section 3107.15.1, 3107.15.2.1)
7. Post “NO SMOKING” signs, which are readily visible throughout the tent/canopy, and enforce this policy. (21 SFC Section 3107.3)
8. The grounds, both inside and outside, shall be kept free and clear of combustible waste. Any waste shall be removed and stored in an approved manner. (21 SFC Sections 3107.18 & 3107.19)

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9. There shall be no open flame devices or demonstrations allowed in the tent without prior approval by the Fire Prevention Division. (21 SFC Section 3107.4)
10. The sidewalls drop and top of the tent shall be of flame retardant material. (21 SFC Section 3104.2)
11. Any unforeseen conditions that would present a fire hazard, or would contribute to rapid spread of a fire, or would delay or interfere with a rapid exit from the tent, which are not covered by this permit, shall be immediately abated or corrected. (21 SFC Section 105.3)
12. Only electric powered heating devices are allowed inside the tent. All other heating devices (e.g. propane, diesel and kerosene fueled) must be outside the tent and require a separate permit issued by the Seattle Fire Department. (21 SFC Sections 105.3 & 105.5)
13. Electric heaters and other electric appliances shall be listed and approved by UL, FM or other approved testing agencies and plugged into an approved electrical outlet. (21 SFC Section 603.9)
14. Wiring shall be clearly marked to avoid becoming a tripping hazard (21 SFC Section 105.3)
15. To be valid, this permit and attachments must be posted near the occupancy/activities. (21 SFC Section 105.3.5)
16. Loose seats, folding chairs or similar seating, greater in number than 200, shall be bonded together in-groups of three or more. (21 SFC Section 1030.15)
17. A document hereafter referred to as a “Letter of Structural Stability (LOSS)” shall be provided upon application for this permit (21 SFC Section 3103.6 and 3103.9)
18. Temporary tents shall not be occupied during periods of snow or ice accumulation unless designed for full structural loading per the Seattle Building Code. (21 SFC Section 3103.9)