

25 Most Common International Fire Code (IFC) Violations for Businesses

Dear Business Owner,

In an effort to better serve you and help you prevent fire hazards within your business, the following is a list of the **25 Most Common International Fire Code (IFC 2021) Violations**. Knowing and being able to recognize these violations will not only help keep your business in compliance with the code, but it will help to keep you, your customers, and the community safe! If you have any questions regarding these common code violations, please do not hesitate to contact any member of the Great Falls Fire Rescue Fire Prevention Bureau.

Respectfully,

Mike McIntosh – Assistant Chief – Prevention
Great Falls Fire Rescue – 406-727-8070



1. Addressing. Numbers shall be provided for all new and existing buildings in such a position as to be plainly visible and legible from the street or road fronting the property. Numbers shall be a minimum of 4" high, with a contrasting background. (IFC 2012 505.1)
2. Combustibles too close to the Ceiling. In buildings with sprinklers, combustibles are to be at least 18" below sprinkler heads. In buildings without sprinklers, the minimum distance to the ceiling is 24". Also, do not store combustibles under unprotected stairways. (IFC 315.3.1)
3. Combustibles too close to Heat Producing Devices. We recommend keeping combustibles at least 2 feet from appliances and at least 6" from baseboard heaters. Appliances include, but are not limited to furnaces, water heaters, and portable heaters. (IFC 305.1)
4. Commercial Cooking Hood and Duct Cleaning. Hoods, grease-removal devices, fans, ducts, and other appurtenances shall be cleaned at intervals necessary to prevent the accumulation of grease. Cleanings shall be recorded, and records shall state the extent, time, and date of cleaning. Records shall be kept on the premises. High volume cooking requires a 3 month inspection; all other cooking operations should be inspected every 6 months. (IFC 606.3.3.1)
5. Commercial Cooking Hood and Duct Extinguishing System. Dry chemical extinguishing systems shall be inspected and tested for proper operation at 6 month intervals. Clean agent systems shall be inspected and tested at 12 month intervals. (IFC 904.6.1 and 904.10)
6. Egress Means/Obstructions. Means of egress shall be free from obstructions, including snow and ice (IFC 1032). Combustible materials shall not be stored in exits or exit enclosures. (IFC 315.3)
7. Electrical Panels. Electrical panels shall be easily accessible and combustible materials shall not be stored within 3 feet. The working space shall not be less than the width of the panel. Cover holes in electrical panels with blank plastic covers. Do not place tape over circuit breakers. Electrical rooms shall be identified. (IFC 603.4 and 603.4.1)
8. Emergency Lights. The bulb or bulbs must be lit when the test button is pushed. If the light(s) do not work, the battery may need to be replaced. (IFC 1032.10)
9. Exit Signs. Many exit signs are equipped with a battery back-up in case of loss of power. Push the test button to check if the battery and D/C lights are operating. If not, it is probably the battery that needs replacing and not the bulbs. All bulbs need to function. (IFC 1013)
10. Obstructed Exits. Exit aisles for the public shall be free of obstructions and not less than 36" in width. (IFC 1018 and 1032)

11. Fire-rated Doors. These self-closing doors shall not be blocked open, obstructed, nor made inoperable. (IFC 701.1, IFC 1010)
12. Extension Cords. Extension cords are for temporary use only and are not to be used in lieu of permanent wiring. They may be used for up to 90 days or unplugged when not in use. Extension cords cannot pass through doorways, walls, floors, or ceilings, nor under floor coverings unless protected in conduit. Extension cords shall be used only with portable appliances and grounded. Extension cords shall show no signs of damage and shall not be plugged into each other. (IFC 603.6)
13. Extinguishers. Annual service must be performed by a licensed fire extinguisher contractor. Most businesses need a minimum 2A extinguisher for every 3,000 square feet or 75 feet travel distance. We recommend a 2A:10B:C (5lb commercial) extinguisher. Extinguishers need to be mounted a highly visible and accessible location. (IFC 906)
14. Fire Alarm Systems. Fire alarm systems shall be serviced annually and the Fire Alarm Control Panel (FACP) shall be easily accessible. Request your alarm inspector tag the FACP with the service date or have the inspection report available on site. (IFC 907.8 – 907.10 & Chapter 14 of NFPA 72)
15. Fire Sprinkler Systems. Fire sprinkler systems shall be serviced annually. A maintenance tag is required to be placed on the sprinkler system. Maintain clear access to the riser and do not store items within 3 feet of the riser system. A sprinkler head cabinet needs to be mounted next to the riser, containing a sprinkler head wrench and a minimum of six spare sprinkler heads. (IFC 901, NFPA 25)
16. Key Box. If there is a key box (also known as a Knox Box) for your business, provide a working key. (IFC 506.1) Contact Great Falls Fire Rescue for purchasing information.
17. Open Junction Boxes. Open junction boxes and open-wiring splices shall be prohibited. Approved covers shall be provided for all switch and electrical outlet boxes. (IFC 603.2.2)
18. Piggy-backed Surge Protectors. Surge protectors (power taps) shall be equipped with over-current protection and must be plugged into an outlet, not extension cords or other surge protectors. (IFC 603.5)
19. Pressurized Cylinders. Cylinders or tanks, whether empty or full, need to be chained/secured in such a way so they cannot tip over. (IFC 5303.5)
20. Signage. On doors to sprinkler riser room or to the fire alarm panel, place “Riser Room” or “FACP” (Fire Alarm Control Panel) sign on door, using a sign approved by the Fire Prevention Bureau. (IFC 509)
21. Sprinkler Heads. There needs to be a minimum of 18” clearance around sprinkler heads. (IFC 315.3.1)
22. Storage in Equipment/Electrical Rooms. Combustible material shall not be stored in boiler rooms, mechanical rooms, elevator rooms, or electrical equipment rooms. (IFC 315.3.3)
23. Thumb-Turn Deadbolts. This type of deadbolt is against the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for exit doors in public places (IFC 1010.2.5). Exit doors are to remain unlocked during business hours. (IFC 10010.24)
24. Unprotected Ceilings. Keep ceiling tiles in place or replace when damaged. Fire spreads rapidly through openings in ceilings. Seal all holes in ceilings and walls and keep attic-access lids in place. (IFC 703.1)
25. Waste Accumulation. Combustible waste material, creating a fire hazard, shall not be allowed to accumulate in buildings or structures or upon premises. (IFC 304.1)