STATE OF MARYLAND

DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE

OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Martin O'Malley
Governor

Anthony G. Brown
Lt. Governor

1201 Reisterstown Road
Pikesville, MD 21208
410-653-8980
Fax 410-653-8988
Toll Free 800-525-3124

Colonel Marcus L. Brown
Superintendent

Brian S. Geraci
State Fire Marshal

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Assistant State Fire Marshals, Special Deputy State Fire Marshals, Deputy State Fire Marshals, Fire Safety Inspectors and Fire Protection Engineers

FROM: Brian S. Geraci, State Fire Marshal

DATE: October 1, 2014

RE: Minimum Fire and Life Safety Guidelines for "Haunted Houses"

Purpose: To establish minimum fire and/or life safety guidelines for the use and operation of "Haunted Houses" in the State of Maryland.

Scope: The following guidelines are intended to apply to "Haunted Houses" which typically operate during the Halloween season at special community or local fund raising events. They may also apply to similar commercial activities such as carnivals and other seasonal amusement activities.

Fire and Life Safety Guidelines: These guidelines have been updated to include requirements prescribed in the NFPA 1 Fire Code, 2012 edition, and the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code, 2012 edition, both of which are incorporated by reference as part of the State Fire Prevention Code. These guidelines are necessarily general in scope and should be applied with appropriate professional judgment and common sense with respect to the overall fire and life safety situation.

By nature, many special amusement buildings are unique; thus, the fire safety concerns are unique and must be evaluated accordingly. Special attention should be given to overall egress arrangement, exit travel distances, exit signage and emergency lighting, use of flammable liquids and combustible interior finish and construction materials, use and operational condition of fire detection, alarm and extinguishing equipment, use of special effects, adequate trained and supervised staff, established emergency procedures, and readily available means to notify local fire, police and emergency medical services. For added safety, it may be necessary to limit occupant load, add additional emergency exits or establish other special precautions to minimize a potential risk due to some unique circumstance. In any event, every effort should be made to provide an enjoyable but fire safe environment as determined by the local fire inspection authority.

1. In general, haunted houses shall comply with the provisions of the State Fire Prevention Code and shall be classified as a "Special Amusement Building" as defined in the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code, 2012 edition. New facilities are addressed in section 12.4.7 and existing facilities are addressed in section 13.4.7. In addition, all Special Amusement Buildings, regardless of occupant load, shall meet the requirements for Assembly Occupancies. (12.4.7.1 and 13.4.7.1).

2. Every special amusement building, other than buildings or structures not exceeding 10 feet in height and not exceeding 160 square feet in horizontal projection, shall be protected throughout by an approved automatic sprinkler system. Where the special amusement building is movable or portable, the sprinkler water supply shall be permitted to be provided by an approved, temporary means. (Note: In some instances, such as barns and abandoned houses, this may present significant practical hardships for temporary occupancies. As an alternative, consideration may be given to the overall fire and life safety risk, on a case-by-case basis, to determine if additional safety precautions such as additional exits, limited occupant load, additional staff to perform "fire watch" duties, etc. will provide a reasonable level of safety as determined by the local fire authority.

3. Each occupied floor shall be provided with at least two (2) approved means of egress, located as remote as possible from each other. For small facilities, the second means of egress may be an approved "means of escape" such as a window or escape hatch which leads to a safe area outside the building. Each exit and the access to reach it shall be clearly indicated and marked by directional exit signs as necessary so that every occupant can readily see the direction of escape from any point.

4. Unoccupied floors or areas not allowed to be occupied by the general public shall be appropriately secured against unauthorized entry.

5. Any doorway or passageway that is not an exit or a way to reach an exit, but may be mistaken as an exit, shall be identified with a "No Exit" sign to prevent occupant confusion with designated exits. Every effort shall be made to prevent occupants from mistakenly traveling into dead-end spaces in a fire emergency.

6. Exits shall be identified by approved self-luminous or electrically illuminated exit signs, permanently or temporarily wired in a satisfactory manner. Exit signs may be externally illuminated by a reliable power source. The size of the letters in the word "Exit" shall be large enough to be seen but not less than 6-inches high and ¾-inches wide. The exit sign shall be of a distinctive color on a contrasting background (e.g.: red or green letters on a white background or vice-versa) and shall be readily apparent with respect to nearby decorations, interior finish, or other signs.

7. If necessary, low level exit signs located at or near floor level shall be provided in accordance with Section 7.10.1.6. Consideration may also be given to special floor proximity egress path marking such as special internally illuminated wiring, reflective tape or other acceptable product.

8. All interior stairs and other vertical openings between floors shall be properly enclosed, sealed or otherwise protected against possible fire spread, as considered necessary in accordance with the NFPA Life Safety Code.

9. No decorations, furnishings or equipment shall be allowed to obstruct, impair or otherwise detract attention from the visibility or use of an exit. Under no circumstances shall an exit be part of a mirrored wall.

10. Where the nature of the special amusement building is such that it is operates in reduced lighting levels, the building shall be protected throughout by an approved automatic smoke detection system in accordance with NFPA 101, Section 9.6. Actuation of any smoke detection system device shall sound an alarm at a constantly attended location on the premises. Actuation of the automatic sprinkler system, or any other suppression system, or actuation of a smoke detection system device shall result in the following:

    A. Cause illumination in the means of egress to increase to that required by Section NFPA 101, 7.8.

    B. Stop any conflicting or confusing sounds and visuals.

    (Note: As an alternative to the above, consideration may be given to use of a master lighting switch under the direct control of an attendant at a constantly attended location that would illuminate the total area in the event of emergency or activation of smoke alarms. This should be limited to small or temporary facilities.)

11. Where mazes, mirrors or other layouts are designed to confound the egress path, approved directional exit marking that will become apparent to the occupant in an emergency shall be provided.

12. Emergency lighting is required along all means of egress and in all assembly areas. Battery packs are acceptable as well as emergency generators if the building is to be occupied on a temporary basis. Consideration may be given to the use of flash lights or other portable battery operated hand lights under certain circumstances provided an adequate number of such devices and assigned supervisory personnel are available as directed by the fire official.

13. Construction of interior partitions, cubicles, mazes and the like shall be of non-combustible materials such as gypsum wallboard on wood or metal studs, brick, concrete block, plaster, etc. Under no circumstances shall the extensive use of exposed plywood, wood paneling or wood frame partitions be allowed where such material would substantially contribute to the ignition, spread or intensity of a fire. Use of fire retardant treated materials shall be restricted since many such products tend to produce unacceptably high levels of smoke when exposed to fire. In any case, interior construction materials shall be consistent with the general type of construction of the building.

14. Interior finish of walls and ceilings shall be Class "A" throughout (flame spread 25 or less) in accordance with Section 10.2.

15. Use of draperies, cardboard, sheet plastic and flammable vinyl materials for use as interior finish or display purposes shall not be used unless they are inherently flame resistive, self-extinguishing or otherwise fire retardant treated in an approved manner as per NFPA 701.

16. Under no circumstances shall the use of exposed cellular or foam plastic, foam rubber or similarly highly combustible "cushion" or "molded" material be allowed, unless such material is covered or otherwise protected by gypsum wallboard, plaster or other non-combustible covering providing at least a 15 minute fire resistance rating. (Note: As an alternative, a display using such material may be located within a fire rated enclosure with wire glass or fire rated glass vision panels.)

17. All wiring and electrical appliances must comply with the National Electrical Code, NFPA 70. A licensed electrician shall install all wiring. Special attention should be given to assure adequate clearance is provided between electrical appliances subject to heated surfaces and nearby combustible materials. All electrical wiring and electrical appliances shall be subject to inspection by an approved electrical inspection agency.

18. Special attention shall be given to the permitted types of construction for Assembly Occupancies for new or existing construction as prescribed by the NFPA Life Safety Code, Sections 12.1.6 and 13.1.6 respectively. Where such existing construction requirements cannot be met, consideration may be given to restrict the occupant load to not more than fifty (50) persons.

19. Smoking and the use of pyrotechnic devices (fireworks) or open flame devices such as cigarette lighters, candles, canisters, kerosene lamps, kerosene heaters, flash powder, shall be strictly prohibited inside or around the outside of special amusement buildings or display areas. Signs shall be conspicuously posted for this purpose.

20. Adequate "Fire Lanes" and emergency access to the premises shall be provided in cooperation with the local fire department.

21. An adequate number and type of portable fire extinguishers shall be provided on the premises for use by the staff. At least one 2A:10BC (10-lb. multi-purpose) rated fire extinguisher shall be provided within 75 ft. travel distance to all areas. Extinguishers shall be properly mounted and located near an exit. All staff shall be familiar with the location and use of such fire extinguishers.

22. All staff shall be trained and drilled in the duties they are to perform in case of fire, panic or other emergency to effect orderly exiting. This shall include personnel specifically assigned to notify the fire department and other appropriate emergency services. Staff shall be specifically instructed to devote their immediate attention to the safe evacuation of occupants and notification of the fire department before attempting to fight a fire, in order to prevent possible injury or delayed alarm.

23. Where deemed necessary by the fire authority, an automatic smoke detection system shall be provided to warn occupants of a fire, especially in a building where a fire may not be immediately obvious to provide adequate occupant warning. Use of battery operated smoke alarms may be considered for this purpose on a temporary basis if acceptable to the fire authority.

24. For added safety, the fire authority may limit the occupant load to a small group of people at a time to be "ushered" through a display with proper supervision. Also, the general public shall be restricted to only those floors or areas which are provided with sufficient exits as prescribed by the NFPA Life Safety Code.

25. All required exits shall be kept unlocked and readily accessible at all times when the building is occupied. Egress doors shall be operable from the direction of exit travel without the use of a key, tool or special knowledge.

26. The local fire department (Chief Officer) shall be contacted and advised of the precise site location and address of the activity and the proposed dates and hours of operation so they may have the opportunity to make any appropriate pre-plan arrangements.

Effective Date: The aforementioned fire and life safety guidelines for Haunted Houses shall be effective this date and shall remain in force until cancelled or superseded by other directive from the State Fire Marshal.

Those personnel requiring further assistance or advice concerning these guidelines should contact the Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal or Chief Fire Protection Engineer of the Office of the State Fire Marshal.