



**TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL
Fire Department**

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Below, please find “Frequently Asked Questions” about Fire Inspections, Fees, and Billing.

Frequently Asked Questions

When did required fire inspections start?

- *The North Carolina Legislature mandated every structure, other than 1 & 2 family dwellings, be inspected for fire code violations on a rotating structured time line in response to a factory fire in Hamlet, NC that killed 25 workers in 1991. In an effort to avoid future fire tragedies, all local jurisdictions were mandated to adopt the fire inspection schedule after 1991.*

No one asked for this fire inspection, why must you complete one?

- *The State of North Carolina requires inspections on a rotating basis (every year through every three years) based upon the type of building occupancy, and mandates that fire inspectors have access during normal business hours. Some inspections are mandated for North Carolina occupational licensing requirements, such as a Daycare license’s, Foster Homes or ABC permits.*

My business is not in the Town of Chapel Hill, why am I being inspected by the Chapel Hill Fire Department’s Office of the Fire Marshal/Life Safety Division?

- *Your business is located in the Town’s extraterritorial jurisdiction area (ETJ). By State statute, the municipality’s jurisdiction includes all areas within the corporate limits of the municipality and ETJ’s. These areas are established as provided for in North Carolina General Statutes, and common in most cities in the state.*

Who will be completing fire inspections at my business?

- *Personnel from the Office of the Fire Marshal/Life Safety Division of the Chapel Hill Fire Department complete state required fire inspections. All personnel are uniformed fire marshals that have received specialized and advanced training to conduct required fire inspections. They have expertise in fire prevention education, fire code enforcement and can explain firsthand how fires endanger lives and property of building occupants and first responders. They may sometimes also be accompanied by other specialists, such as Building or Trade Inspectors (Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing, Housing and Zoning), to assist them with certain matters.*

I pay property taxes, why will I get a bill for a fire inspection?

- *State law requires occupancies to be inspected every 1 to 3 years on a rotating basis. This is an unfunded State mandate that requires significant resources to complete.*

Who decides how much a fire inspection fee should cost?

- *Each year the Fire Department submits a proposed budget with fees and charges identified as part of the annual budget process. New or changed fees are then adopted within the Town's budget each year. The costs of fire inspections are benchmarked with other NC towns/cities. Chapel Hill Fire Department fees have not been adjusted since 2009-2010.*

It would be more convenient if the fire inspector would complete the fire inspection and any subsequent re-inspection when we are not busy.

- *We will work with you to arrange a fire inspection visit to best complement your business hours. Inform the Fire Marshal who shows up to complete your fire inspection of convenient dates/times to complete the fire inspection.*

Shouldn't my landlord be billed, because I don't own the building?

- *State law requires the use of the building to be inspected; therefore, we bill the business requiring the fire inspection. You may have a lease that makes the building owner responsible for certain items. This is a civil matter between you and the building owner.*

We were planning on vacating the space/building; do I still have to pay for the completed fire inspection?

- *Yes, the fire inspection fee is charged to the existing occupancy upon completion of the fire inspection.*

I have been inspected before and don't remember getting a bill?

- *Fire inspection billing implementation is effective July 1st, 2015. We can research the most recent fire inspection date of the occupancy to determine if an invoice was mailed and date of payment. However, it may be possible that an invoice was not sent, the owner or corporate office paid, or a mistake was made.*

Can you change the re-inspection date?

- *Re-inspection time frames are typically consistent. Fire Marshals try to give all occupancies the same re-inspection time frame for return to verify any violations have been corrected. We realize some issues may take longer to correct, and we may visit to verify compliance efforts are underway or to provide technical assistance. However, uncured violations noted upon re-inspection will incur additional charges.*

What happens if I do not correct my fire code violations?

- *Our goal is always education of occupants, owners and tenants regarding violation(s) found during inspection, and the importance and need to correct violation(s) as soon as possible. However, fire code violations endanger you, firefighters, occupants, your business, and the public. Violations have significant repercussions when left uncorrected. NC State law also provides for both civil monetary penalties and possible criminal charges. We always prefer to work with you so that such actions are not needed. The overall goal of the Chapel Hill Fire Department is always to see fire and life safety compliance through corrections and improvements, not through the issuance of fines or criminal actions.*

Additional questions can be directed to the Chapel Hill Fire Department, Office of the Fire Marshal/Life Safety Division through the Town web page www.townofchapelhill.org, our main office phone 919-968-2781 or via email to Fire Marshal Tommy Gregory at tgregory@townofchapelhill.org.