



# FIRE WATCH OPERATIONS

## A. General

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**Scope** This document covers fire watch operations at facilities where a required fire alarm, emergency communications, and/or fire sprinkler systems, etc. is out of service either due to an emergency or otherwise planned impairment.

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**Purpose** The purpose of this document is to define when fire watch operations should be implemented, proper notification of authorities, and to provide a summary of the fire code requirements for conducting a fire watch.

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**Application** This document applies when a required fire protection system is out of service and must be provided for all occupants left unprotected by the shutdown until the required fire protection system has been returned to service.

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**Referenced Publications** This guideline is based primarily on the requirements of:

- North Carolina Fire Prevention Code; 2012 Edition
- Applicable NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) standards.

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**Definitions** The following definitions will help to understand key terms associated with fire watch operations:

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Approved	Acceptable to the Fire Code Official
Emergency Communication System	A system for the protection of life by indicating the existence of an emergency situation and communicating information necessary to facilitate an appropriate response and action
Fire Code Official	The fire chief or other designated authority charged with the administration and enforcement of the code, or a duly authorized representative.
Fire Command Center	The principal attended or unattended location where the status of the detection, alarm communications and control systems is displayed, and from which the system(s) can be manually controlled.

Fire Protection System	Approved devices, equipment and systems or combinations of systems used to detect a fire, activate an alarm, extinguish or control a fire, control or manage smoke and products of a fire or any combination thereof.
Fire Watch	A temporary measure intended to ensure continuous and systematic surveillance of a building or portion thereof by one or more qualified individuals for the purposes of identifying and controlling fire hazards, detecting early signs of unwanted fire, raising an alarm of fire and notifying the fire department
Hot Work	Work involving burning, welding, or a similar operation that is capable of initiating fires or explosions
Impairment	An abnormal condition where a system, component, or function is out of order, and the condition can result in the system or unit not functioning when required.
Impairment Coordinator	The person responsible for the maintenance of a particular fire protection system.

## B. Fire Watch Requirements

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### **Fire Watch Personnel**

When, in the opinion of the fire code official, it is essential for public safety in a place of assembly or any other place where people congregate, because of the number of persons, or the nature of the performance, exhibition, display, contest or activity, the owner, agent or lessee shall provide one or more fire watch personnel, as required and approved, to remain on duty during the times such places are open to the public, or when such activity is being conducted.

Duties: Fire watch personnel shall keep diligent watch for fires, obstructions to means of egress and other hazards during the time such place is open to the public or such activity is being conducted and take prompt measures for remediation of hazards, extinguishment of fires that occur and assist in the evacuation of the public from the structures.

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**Systems Out of Service “Impaired”** Where a required fire protection system is out of service, the fire department and the fire code official shall be notified immediately and, where required by the fire code official, the building shall either be evacuated or an approved fire watch shall be provided for all occupants left unprotected by the shutdown until the fire protection system has been returned to service.

Where utilized, fire watches shall be provided with at least **one** approved means for notification of the fire department and their **only** duty shall be to perform constant patrols of the protected premises and keep watch for fires.

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**Impairment Coordinator** The building owner shall assign an impairment coordinator to comply with the requirements of this section. In the absence of a specific designee, the owner shall be considered the impairment coordinator.

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**Tag Required** A tag shall be used to indicate that a system, or portion thereof, has been removed from service.

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**Placement of Tag** The tag shall be posted at each fire department connection, system control valve, fire alarm control unit, fire alarm annunciator and fire command center, indicating which system, or part thereof, has been removed from service. The fire code official shall specify where the tag is to be placed.

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**Preplanned Impairment Programs** Preplanned impairments shall be authorized by the impairment coordinator. Before authorization is given, a designated individual shall be responsible for verifying that **all** of the following procedures have been implemented:

- The extent and expected duration of the impairment have been determined.
- The areas or buildings involved have been inspected and the increased risks determined.
- Recommendations have been submitted to management or building owner/manager.
- The Fire Code Official, local fire department, insurance carrier, alarm company, building owner/manager, and any other authorities having jurisdiction have been notified.
- Supervisors & employees in the affected area have been notified.

- A tag impairment system has been implemented
  - Necessary tools and materials have been assembled on the impairment site.
  - All unnecessary hot work has been suspended or managed
  - Smoking has been suspended or relocated to a safe area outdoors
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**Emergency Impairments**

When unplanned impairments occur, appropriate emergency action shall be taken to minimize potential injury and damage. The impairment coordinator shall implement the steps outlined above as soon as practical.

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**Restoring Systems to Service**

When impaired equipment is restored to normal working order, the impairment coordinator shall verify that **all** of the following procedures have been implemented:

- Necessary inspections and tests have been conducted to verify that affected systems are operational.
  - The Fire Code Official, local fire department, insurance carrier, alarm company, building owner/manager, and any other authorities having jurisdiction have been notified that protection has been restored.
  - All impairment tags have been removed.
  - Supervisors & employees in the affected area have been notified.
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## C. Notification / Contact Numbers

**Fire Code Official**

The Gaston County Fire Marshal's Office (GCFMO) serves as the Fire Code Official for all unincorporated areas of Gaston County and for those municipalities for which it has contracted authority. The initial notification shall be made to the GCFMO either [online](#) or by phone and, if so agreed upon, can serve as the single point of notification for the local Fire Department as well. Normal business hours are Monday thru Friday except County Holidays between the hours of 8:00am and 5:00pm.

Call: **(704) 866-3355**

After Hours & Weekend calls should be made to the Gaston County 911 Communications Center on their non-emergency line

Call: **(704) 866-3300\***

\*Request that the On-Call Fire Marshal be notified of the impairment

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## D. Forms & Documentation

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### **Fire Watch Notification**

Use the link below to access an automated system to notify the Gaston County Fire Marshal's Office of your request to conduct a fire watch due to an emergency or a preplanned impairment.

<https://egov.gastongov.com/FireMarshalForms/FireMarshalFireWatch.aspx>

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### **Fire Watch Log**

Use the link below to access a two-sided printable PDF to document and log your fire watch.

<http://www.gastongov.com/Documents/fire-marshall/FireWatchLog.pdf>

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### **Fire Watch Tag**

Use the link below to access a printable tag indicating where a system, or portion thereof, has been removed from service.

<http://www.gastongov.com/Documents/fire-marshall/FireWatchOutOfServiceTag.pdf>

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