

NEW JERSEY UNIFORM FIRE CODE

Enforcement of the New Jersey Uniform Fire Code (NJUFC) is one of the many and varied services provided by the Millburn Fire Department. More importantly, it is a service which the “consumer public” or general citizenry is entitled. In order to better understand the NJUFC, a review of the events leading up to its enactment is imperative.

During the 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's the State of New Jersey, as well as the rest of the United States, experienced an exceptionally large number of fires and fire deaths. In addition to a significant volume increase in fires and fire death in New Jersey's larger cities, two major multiple death fires occurred within Monmouth County. The first occurred in 1980 when 24 people died at the Brinley Inn (Bradley Beach). The second occurred in 1981 at the Beachview Rest Home (Keansburg) where 31 people died. These tragedies were a major thrust leading up to the November 12, 1983 enactment of the “Uniform Fire Safety Act”. State Senator and Newark Fire Department Director, John P. Caulfield, was one of the primary proponents of this legislation.

The Uniform Fire Safety Act created the Fire Safety Commission. The Commission's responsibilities included ensuring the state and its citizens were protected against fire hazards by a uniform “minimum” fire safety code. Pursuant to the enactment of the Uniform Fire Safety Act and the efforts of the Fire Safety Commission, the New Jersey Uniform Fire Code was adopted on February 19th, 1985. The State of New Jersey, Division of Fire Safety (DFS), under the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), oversees its application.

The NJUFC governs mandatory requirements for fire inspections, firefighter training and instruction, fire investigation, firefighting equipment and other related emergency incidents. The NJUFC is divided into two parts - the Fire Prevention Code and the Fire Safety Code. The Fire Safety Code was enacted in 1985 as an addition to the NJUFC and regulates the proper maintenance of existing fire protection features of an occupancy; where as, the Fire Safety Code enacted in 1986, addresses retrofit requirements and orders modifications of an occupancy lacking fire safety protection. An example of a retrofit requirement is the July 5th, 2000 “Sprinkler Bill” requiring all public and private colleges and boarding schools to install fire sprinkler systems. Unfortunately, this law was enacted in response to the tragic deaths and injuries to several Seton Hall University students as result of a fire in their dormitory on January 19th, 2000. Other aspects of the NJUFC are:

1. Issuing certificates of smoke, carbon monoxide and fire extinguisher compliance prior to the sale lease or change of occupancy of a residential dwelling unit. This certifies that the residence had working, properly

- placed smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, as well as, a mounted fire extinguisher at the time of sale or lease.
2. Requiring windowless basements to be alarmed and/or sprinklered and to provide fire department access into below grade areas that do not have openings of required dimension. This section was enacted due to the death of a New Jersey firefighter as a result of a basement fire. The basement lacked appropriate access openings, fire detection and fire suppression systems.
 3. Requires structures of “truss construction” to be identified as such by having an emblem of bright reflective color in the shape of a triangle affixed them. This section was again enacted to alert firefighters to the danger of truss construction after the death of five New Jersey firefighters in the collapse of a truss constructed structure involved in fire.
 4. Requires Amusement buildings or any structure designed to disorient, reduce vision, present barriers or impede the flow of traffic (such as haunted houses or houses of terror) to be equipped with fire detection and suppression systems, as well as, other fire safety provisions. Once again, the deaths of several teenagers in a haunted house at a New Jersey amusement park caused this section to be enacted.
 5. Establishes Fire Safety Permits (FSP). An FSP is required in order to maintain, store or handle hazardous materials, or to conduct processes which produce conditions hazardous to life and property, or to install equipment used in connection with such activities. Examples for which an FSP is required include the use of a torch, welding or cutting operations, discharge of fireworks, fumigation, and bonfires.
 6. Addresses general fire safety pertaining to a multitude of NJUFC issues. These include and are not limited to maintenance of fire detection and suppression systems, fire extinguishers, means of egress (exiting), storage and housekeeping, electrical safety, heating appliance safety, and cooking appliance safety.

The NJUFC is extremely detailed and requires competent, licensed fire inspectors to interpret and apply. Becoming a fire inspector requires State certification obtained through appropriate coursework and testing. Once certified, a fire inspector must complete required continuing education training annually. Furthermore, if an inspector knowingly fails to perform his duty as imposed by the NJUFC, he or she can be held criminally liable.

New Jersey residents are fortunate that fire safety is regarded as such a serious matter and requires a minimum acceptable level of fire safety for all its citizens.