



Fact Sheet on: What is the State Fire Code?

Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal

Pat Quinn, Governor • Larry Matkaitis, State Fire Marshal

April 2013

What is the State Fire Code and where does it apply?

Q. How did Illinois adopt a Fire Code?

- ✓ The State Fire Marshal was established in Illinois to protect the public from the dangers of fire or collapse in structures across the state. This power has existed since 1909 and continues to exist in state statute under the Fire Investigation Act (425 ILCS 25/9). This Public Act gives the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) authority to adopt rules to protect the public. These rules have the effect of law in Illinois.
- ✓ The state fire code is adopted through the state's Administrative Rules process. The OSFM has adopted the Life Safety Code published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). This code, known as the "NFPA 101 Life Safety Code" was first adopted in 1988. Currently the State of Illinois enforces the 2000 edition.

Q. Why adopt the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code?

- ✓ The NFPA 101 Life Safety Code is adopted to protect the public. Although neither a building code nor a fire prevention code, the Life Safety Code does address construction, protection, and occupancy features necessary to minimize danger to life from fire, including smoke, fumes or panic. The Life Safety Code is more than a fire code; it is also commonly known as an "exit code" because its intent is to allow occupants time and means to escape a building during a fire or other emergency.
- ✓ The NFPA 101 Life Safety Code is a nationally recognized code developed by consensus technical committees of experts. NFPA consensus committees balance representation of various interests including manufacturers, installers, labor, applied research laboratories, enforcing authorities, insurers, consumers, and special experts.
- ✓ The OSFM believes the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code applies the proper level of safety for Illinois occupancies. Unlike many other codes, the Life Safety Code applies to both new construction and existing occupancies. The Life Safety Code recognizes that improvements in systems and technology as well as lessons learned from real-life tragedies should not only benefit new construction.
- ✓ The NFPA 101 Life Safety Code is compatible with all nationally-published building codes.

Q. Where does the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code apply?

- ✓ The NFPA 101 Life Safety Code is applicable throughout the state. The Life Safety Code applies to all occupied buildings with the exception of Illinois public schools that fall under the codes and rules of the Illinois State Board of Education.
- ✓ The OSFM-adopted NFPA 101 Life Safety Code is applicable even in home rule communities. In accordance with the Fire Investigation Act, local fire chiefs are responsible for enforcing the code adopted by the OSFM unless their community has adopted fire prevention and safety standards equal to or higher than the OSFM-adopted code. Thus, the OSFM-adopted Life Safety Code sets the minimum level of life safety that must be provided statewide. In no instance can locally-adopted codes be less stringent than the OSFM-adopted code.