

# REGULATION MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**Related Entries:** COB-RA, EKA-RA  
**Responsible Office:** Deputy Superintendent of Schools  
Chief Operating Officer

## Fire Safety

### I. PURPOSE

To prescribe minimum requirements and controls to safeguard life, property, and the welfare of all persons on Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) sites

### II. AUTHORITY

Chapter 22 of the laws of Montgomery County, the Fire Safety Code, shall apply to MCPS sites. The Montgomery County Fire Marshal enforces all laws and ordinances covered by Chapter 22. Any questions regarding fire safety should be referred to the Office of Fire Code Enforcement.

### III. DEFINITIONS

A. *Appropriate office* means the deputy, associate or community superintendent for:

- Office of School Performance when referring to regular schools;
- Office of Special Education and Student Services when referring to special education centers and alternative programs; and
- Office of the Chief Operating Officer when referring to all other sites

B. *Evacuation* means the physical movement from an area of hazard to an area of safety.

C. An *MCPS site* is defined as any school or facility, including grounds owned or occupied by MCPS. The definition includes the location of an MCPS-sponsored activity.

- D. *Principal/director* refers to the administrator responsible for a school or office, as appropriate.
- E. *Students and staff with disabilities* refer to individuals with a temporary or permanent disability that would delay or impede the ability of an individual to evacuate the building in an emergency (e.g., individual requiring the use of a wheelchair, cane, crutches, or prosthetic device).
- F. *Type A Model Rocket* is defined as a model rocket powered by compressed air or water.
- G. *Type B Model Rocket* is defined as a reusable, lightweight, non-metallic flight vehicle that is propelled vertically by an electronically ignited, commercially made, nationally certified, and non-explosive solid fuel rocket motor, as defined by the National Association of Rocketry. No liquid fuel or fuse, wick or open flame ignitions are allowed.

#### IV. PROCEDURES

##### A. Fire

##### 1. Evacuation

When a fire occurs in a building or there is reason to believe a fire exists in a building, the building shall be evacuated immediately and not reoccupied without the permission of the fire official in charge. Any person who has knowledge of a fire shall activate the manual fire alarm immediately. Complete evacuation is not required when other procedures are detailed in a fire plan that has been approved by the Montgomery County Fire Marshal.

##### 2. Notifying the Fire Department

The principal/director shall notify the fire department immediately.

- a) This requirement shall not be construed to forbid the principal/director from using all diligence necessary to extinguish such fire prior to the arrival of the fire department.
- b) No person shall make, issue, post or maintain any regulation or order, written or verbal, that would require any person to take any delaying action prior to reporting a fire to the central fire communications center.

3. Reporting Fires to MCPS Personnel

After evacuating personnel from the building and telephoning the fire department, the principal/director will telephone the appropriate deputy, associate or community superintendent and report any fire that has caused apparent substantial loss to the MCPS site (also see Regulation COB-RA: *Reporting a Serious Incident*).

4. Fire Plans

The fire evacuation plan within the school emergency/crisis plan details adequate procedures in case of fire and shall be submitted to the Montgomery County Office of Fire Code Enforcement and distributed to appropriate locations in the building.

5. Elevators

Elevators shall not be used in case of fire. Use marked stairways.

6. False Alarms

Any person who deliberately or maliciously gives, signals or transmits or who causes or permits to be given, signaled or transmitted an emergency alarm when, in fact, that person knows that no such emergency exists shall be guilty of a misdemeanor. It shall be unlawful for any person to tamper with or maliciously damage any fire alarm equipment maintained for transmitting fire alarms to the fire department or occupants of the building.

7. Duties of the Principal/Director

The principal/director is responsible for:

- a) Instructing all personnel about fire exit facilities and emergency evacuation drills at the beginning of each school year and at the beginning of the summer session
- b) Assigning a responsible person to inspect all exit facilities daily to make sure that all stairways, doors, and other exits are not obstructed
- c) Informing substitute teachers and all personnel assigned to the MCPS site of the type and location of alarm-sounding devices in the school, the location of all exits, and the exit plan to be used

- d) Allowing sufficient time during drills so that teachers can completely check the roll books before the recall signal is sounded
- e) Posting conspicuously at or near each telephone, the emergency number to call for fire, ambulance, or police
- f) Informing personnel that in case of fire, all decisions will be made by the fire department officer in charge when he/she reports on the scene

B. Fire Evacuation Drill Requirements

1. Number and Frequency of Fire Evacuation Drills Required

It is required that schools conduct a fire evacuation drill at least ten (10) times during every school year and at least once every month with two drills within the first 30 days of school. Adequate records of such fire evacuation drills shall be kept and recorded after each drill and sent to the Montgomery County Office of Fire Code Enforcement at the end of each school year. If the school building is to be occupied during the summer months, at the beginning of that session, three fire evacuation drills should be programmed.

In all cases, a fire drill must be conducted at least every 30 days as required above.

2. Scheduling of Fire Evacuation Drills

Fire evacuation drills shall be executed at different hours of the day or evening, during the changing of classes, when the school is at assembly, during the recess or physical education periods, etc., so as to avoid distinction between drills and actual fires. If a drill is called when students are going up and down the stairways, such as during the time classes are changing, the students shall be instructed to form a line and immediately proceed to the nearest available exit in an orderly manner.

3. Conducting Fire Evacuation Drills on MCPS Sites

Every fire evacuation drill shall be an exercise in fire drill management for principal and teachers, with the chief purpose of every drill being complete control of students/employees. Great stress shall be laid upon the execution of each drill in a brisk, quiet, and orderly manner. Running shall be prohibited.

4. Appointing Monitors

Monitors shall be appointed to assist in the proper execution of all fire evacuation drills. They shall be instructed to hold doors open during evacuation and to close doors to the corridor to prevent spread of fire or smoke. There shall be at least two substitutes for each monitor so as to provide for proper performance in case of absence of the regular monitors. The searching of toilets or other rooms while evacuating the building shall be the duty of the teachers or other members of the staff.

5. Fire Evacuation Drills Should Simulate Actual Fire Conditions

As all fire evacuation drills simulate an actual fire condition, students shall not be allowed to obtain clothing after the alarm is sounded, even when in homeroom, because of the confusion which would result in forming the lines and the danger of tripping over dragging apparel.

6. Class Assembly Points Outside of Building

Each class or group shall proceed to a predetermined point outside the building and remain there while a check is made by the person in charge to see that all are accounted for, leaving only when a recall signal is given to return to the building or when dismissed. Such assembly points shall be sufficiently far away from the building (at least 50 feet from the building) and from each other as to avoid danger from any fire in the building, interference with fire department operations or confusion between classes or groups.

7. Motor Vehicle Traffic Control

Where necessary for drill lines to cross roadways, signs reading STOP! SCHOOL FIRE EVACUATION DRILL or equivalent shall be carried by monitors to the traffic intersecting points in order to stop traffic during the period of the drill.

8. Use of Alarm Bells

All fire evacuation drill alarms shall be sounded on the fire alarm system and not on the signal system used to dismiss classes. The sounding device used to dismiss or change classes should be different from the sounding device used to signal a fire alarm.

9. Preventing Accidental Recall to Building

In order that students/employees will not be returned to a building that is burning, the recall signal shall be one that is separate and distinct from, and cannot be mistaken for, any other signals. Such signals may be given by distinctive colored flags or banners. If the recall signal is electrical, the push buttons or other controls shall be kept under lock, the key for which shall be in the possession of the principal or another designated person to prevent a recall at a time when there is a fire. Regardless of the method of recall, the means of giving the signal shall be kept locked.

10. Exits to Be Clear of Obstructions

The principal/director is responsible for ensuring that all stairways, doors, and other exits are in proper working condition at all times.

11. Exits in Open Plan Buildings

Open plan buildings require extra surveillance to ensure that exit paths remain clear of obstruction and are obvious.

C. Evacuation of the Disabled

Each principal/director shall develop an emergency evacuation plan within the school emergency/crisis plan for students and staff with disabilities. The plan should include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following:

1. Assignments

Each principal/director shall, at the beginning of each school year, develop a list of all students and/or staff with disabilities (permanent or temporary). This list should be updated as necessary. Principals/directors shall assign each student and staff member with disabilities to an individual who could assist his/her relocation or evacuation in the event of an emergency. This staff person could assist the disabled individual in horizontal evacuation (movement from an area of hazard to an area of safety on the same floor).

If a disabled student or staff member is in multiple locations within the school building during the day, an individual can be assigned to assist the disabled individual for each location. Up and down movement of disabled persons in stairwells should never be attempted by untrained personnel. Should their removal from the building be required, trained fire fighters or

rescue squad personnel will perform this task when they arrive at the school. Only under life threatening conditions should individuals attempt to remove disabled persons down a flight of stairs.

2. Other Considerations

- a) Planning for the notification of deaf students
- b) Checking rest rooms and special areas
- c) Caring for medical needs requiring specific procedures
- d) Contacting the local fire department to discuss procedures for evacuation of students and staff with disabilities
- e) Scheduling a fire evacuation drill with the local fire department to test the school plan

3. Areas of Refuge

Remaining in the classroom or other areas remote from the fire should be considered. Door(s) should be closed to prevent smoke from entering the room. If movement of disabled individuals is necessary due to smoke or heat conditions, they can be taken to an area that is separated by a corridor fire door. These doors are designed to close automatically and will keep heat and smoke out from that portion of the building, provided they are closed. Areas of refuge shall be identified in the school emergency/crisis plan.

4. Fire Department Notification

When the fire department arrives on the scene, the locations of these individuals should be made known to the fire department. Rescue operations take priority over fire fighting.

D. Open Fires (Bonfires)

Open fires (bonfires) are prohibited on MCPS sites. Fires, grilling, open flames, and the use of flammable materials, with the exception of charcoal grilling that is specifically granted on an individual basis as part of Adopt-A-Field agreement, is prohibited.

E. Smoking

Smoking is prohibited at all MCPS schools/facilities and on all MCPS sites. It is unlawful for any person to smoke, throw, or deposit any lighted or smoldering substance on MCPS sites.

F. Fireworks

It is unlawful for any person to possess, store, offer for sale, sell, burn, use, or explode any fireworks, except when possession and discharge of fireworks are permitted and conducted under a permit issued by the State Fire Marshal.

G. Model Rocketry

1. Only rockets propelled by compressed air or water, also known as Model A rockets, may be launched on MCPS property.
2. As described in Department of Facilities Management Model Rocketry Safety Guidelines, rockets propelled by sources other than compressed air or water are called Type B Model Rockets and are subject to the following restrictions:
  - a) Type B Model Rockets may be assembled or stored on MCPS property, consistent with Model Rocketry Safety Guidelines.
  - b) Type B Model rockets may not be launched on MCPS property. However, a permit may be obtained to launch such a rocket elsewhere in Montgomery County from the Montgomery County Fire Marshal. Only certified science and/or technology education teachers are authorized to obtain a launch permit, and that teacher must be present and supervise the launch.
  - c) Authorization for assembling, storing or launching Type B Model rockets must be obtained using Form 201-11, *Model Rocket Activity Authorization*.

H. Blasting Caps

Blasting caps are high explosives used to set off other explosives and are dangerous. Students shall be instructed regarding hazards of blasting caps. They should be reminded never to touch blasting caps and immediately notify their parents, police, fire department or teacher, who will arrange for disposal.



I. Storing of Flammable Liquids

1. Storage shall be limited to that required for maintenance, demonstration, treatment, and laboratory work. Flammable liquids in the laboratories and at other points of use shall be in containers not larger than one quart or in safety cans or in storage cabinets. No gasoline-powered equipment shall be allowed inside the building (exception: in rooms designed and approved for flammable liquids storage).
2. A Hazardous Materials Use permit is required from the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service, Office of Fire Code Enforcement for each MCPS site where flammable or combustible liquids are stored or used. This includes fuel pumps.

J. Places of Assembly

1. Capacity

- a) In every place of public assembly, there shall be a certificate of capacity permanently posted in a conspicuous place in the room near the entrance. Such certificates shall be furnished and signed by the Montgomery County Fire Marshal or his/her authorized representative, and such certificates shall read as follows:

Not more than \_\_\_\_ persons permitted in  
(location)

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Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service  
Montgomery County, Maryland

- b) No person in charge shall permit any persons in excess of the number allowed by the capacity certificate for such place. If there is any doubt as to the computation of occupancy load, the number indicated on the capacity certificate shall control.
- c) No person in charge shall sell or permit to be sold for a single performance or between the beginning and end of any single performance or show more tickets or admissions than the number of persons allowed within such place by the capacity certificate. Such sale of an excess number of tickets or admissions shall be prima facie evidence of the violation of the Montgomery County Fire Safety Code.

- d) It is unlawful to operate or use any place of assembly unless the capacity certificate required by Subsection A. above is conspicuously posted.
- e) Any person who fails to leave any site that is overcrowded when told to do so by an MCPS employee or any authorized enforcement officer shall be deemed in violation of the Montgomery County Fire Safety Code and subject to the penalties provided by law.

2. Exits

- a) It is the duty of the person in charge of any theater or place of public assembly to call to the attention of those present, immediately prior to the beginning of the play, address, or other matter of proceedings for which the people are assembled, the number and location of the several exits in the building or hall and to state that the doors to all such exits are unlocked. Before making such announcement, it is the duty of such person to make an actual inspection to verify the fact or to see that said doors are unlocked.

- b) It is the duty of the person in charge of every public or private assembly to call to the attention of everyone present at a performance, address, exhibition, or proceeding the exits by displaying or announcing the following:

For your own safety, LOOK for nearest EXIT. In case of emergency, WALK, do not RUN to that EXIT.

- c) Any of the following may be considered as being in compliance with the requirement for calling the attention of everyone present in any public or private assembly:

- (1) Making an oral announcement of the above notice from stage, platform, or floor at the beginning of every performance, address, exhibition, contest, or other proceedings

- (2) Showing the above notice on cinema screens where moving pictures are shown

- (3) Printing the above notice in bold type letters not less than one-quarter inch in height on the back of programs for such

performance, matters, or other proceedings and making sure that nothing but the notice is on the back page

- (4) Having a fixed sign or signs displaying the above notice printed in letters of a size and clearness that can be easily read from any and every point in the assembly room
- d) The operator or the person in charge of the operation or use of any place of assembly shall check exit facilities before the place of assembly is occupied for any use to determine compliance with the provisions of this section.
- e) During the period of occupancy, an exit door shall not be locked, bolted or otherwise fastened or obstructed by any means that would keep the door from being opened from the inside by the use of the ordinary door latch or knob or by pressure on the door or on a panic release device.
- f) In each room where chairs or tables and chairs are used, the arrangement shall be such as to provide for ready access by aisles to each exit door. Aisles leading directly to an exit door shall not be obstructed by chairs, tables, or other objects.
- g) A part of a stairway, whether interior or exterior, or of a hallway, corridor, vestibule, balcony, or bridge leading to a stairway or exitway shall not be used in any way that will obstruct or restrict its use as a means of exit or that will present a hazardous condition. No storage in or under stairways is permitted.
- h) A plan showing the capacity and location of exitways and of aisles leading thereto shall be submitted for approval to the Montgomery County Office of Fire Code Enforcement, and an approved copy shall be kept on display on the premises.
- i) The fire department representative or fire code enforcement representative, upon finding any overcrowded conditions or obstructions in aisles, passageways, or other means of exit or upon finding any condition that constitutes a serious menace to life shall cause a performance, presentation, spectacle, or entertainment to be stopped until such condition or obstruction is corrected.

## K. Decorations

1. Cotton batting (either natural, artificial, or manufactured), straw, dry vines, leaves, trees, or other highly flammable materials shall not be used for decorative purposes. Electric light bulbs or fixtures or any heat-producing device in any building shall not be decorated with paper or combustible materials whether flameproofed or not. Exit doors, exit lights, fire alarm sending stations, standpipes, pull stations, and fire extinguisher locations shall not be concealed or obstructed by any decorative material.
2. All decorations that will cover more than ten percent of the wall surface area or that will be hung overhead must bear the Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. (UL) seal or other approved testing laboratory seal or pass the flame resistance test.
3. Decorative material shall include all such material as curtains, draperies, streamers, surface coverings applied over interior finish for decorative, acoustical, or other effect; and also cloth, cotton batting, straw, vines, leaves, trees, and moss used for decorative effect. It shall not include floor coverings, ordinary window shades, nor materials one twenty-eighth of an inch or less in thickness applied directly and adhering tightly to a noncombustible base.
4. No decorative material shall be used that, as applied, will ignite and allow flames to spread over the surface or allow burning particles to drop. The piece shall be held in a vertical position and the bottom edge exposed to a flame from a match held in a horizontal position, one-half inch underneath the piece, and at a constant location for a minimum of 12 seconds.
5. Treatments used to accomplish flameproofing shall be renewed as often as may be necessary to maintain the flameproof effect.
6. Plastic coated fabric used as a decorative material shall not be used.
7. In a place of assembly, no motion picture screen or screen masking shall be used that will ignite and allow flame to spread over the surface when exposed to the match flame test described in Subsection D above.

L. Responsibility for Special Events

The building administrator shall be responsible for all fire safety regulations related to special events. All special events shall be held in strict compliance with the Montgomery County Fire Safety Code.

M. Use of Natural Trees in County Schools

1. The use of natural trees as holiday decorations is prohibited.
2. Artificial trees are permitted as follows:
  - a) All artificial trees must bear the UL seal or the Factory Mutual seal as flame resistant if they are to be used in schools.
  - b) Lights cannot be installed on any tree that has a metal finish or metal base.
  - c) If indirect lighting is used, all components of the lighting system must be UL or Factory Mutual approved. Any electrical cords used cannot be run along baseboards or across corridors. No combustible materials are to be used above or within a 12-inch radius of the lights.

N. Booths and Stands

1. All booths, stands, and platforms shall be substantially constructed.
2. Booths and stands shall not obstruct any exit or passageway or block any door.

O. Paper Drives, Storage, Etc.

Paper from paper drives, recycling, etc., shall not be stored within ten feet of buildings, in ways of exit, or on public property (sidewalks, etc.)

P. Use of Propane and Butane

The Montgomery County Fire Marshal and the Montgomery County Office of Fire Code Enforcement shall be notified not less than three days in advance of the proposed installation of any permanent or temporary liquified petroleum gas facility within the county, in any school, fair, or other place of indoor or outdoor public assembly by any person making such installation.

Q. Tents

Regulations for the construction and use of tents are comprehensive and strict. Any use of tents on MCPS sites must be cleared with the Montgomery County Fire Marshal and the Office of Fire Code Enforcement ten days prior to their use.

1. Dry grass, weeds, or brush shall be removed from any space within ten feet of any tent in which the public may assemble; and no hay, straw, woodshavings, dried grass, or other combustible materials shall be used as floor covering, except that dampened sawdust may be used.
2. Cotton or other combustible cloth of any tent covering to which the public is admitted shall be flameproofed to the standards set by the Montgomery County Fire Marshal.

R. Hazardous Gas in Balloons

No person shall use any flammable, oxidizing, toxic, corrosive, or reactive gas to inflate balloons. Air and inert gases that are lighter than air are not prohibited for this purpose.

S. Parades and Floats

1. Only flameproof crepe paper may be used for decorative purposes.
2. The use of tar paper for decorations is prohibited.

**Regulation History:** Formerly Regulation No. 245-1, May, 1982; revised January 12, 1988; reprinted April 1988; revised September 24, 1999; updated office titles December 2005; revised November 8, 2008.