

SDCI Policy Document for Limited Use Emergency Shelters
For discussion at SBCC Shelter/Dwelling Size Adhoc TAG

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11/6/2025

SDCI uses the guidance below to permit flexibility for a “limited use” emergency shelter. Depending on the shelter size/duration, SDCI does not require a change of occupancy to an R occupancy. This guidance includes limits on shelter occupant load and duration, and minimum criteria for egress, emergency systems and shelter operations/standards.

*This guidance was developed almost 10 years ago prior to the pandemic. The regional approach to offering temporary shelter has changed over that time period. During the pandemic, shelter providers were often utilizing existing hotels as emergency shelters. Post pandemic, we have gotten fewer requests for shelters in existing buildings as temporary housing has trended to transitional encampments (tents and tiny house villages). SDCI Tip 316 provides information on Getting a Transitional Encampment Permit from SDCI and can be found here:
<https://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/Tip136.pdf>*

Background

The need for shelters is great due to our homelessness crisis. SDCI recognizes that these types of facilities are unique and warrant different treatment in the construction regulatory process. The Building Official and the Fire Marshal have flexibility in applying Building and Fire code provisions provided a reasonable degree of safety is provided.

Shelter facilities in existing buildings do not fit well into typical residential occupancy categories even though the shelters provide sleeping accommodations. Shelters are supervised while the occupants are sleeping, and shelters are required to provide features that allow occupants to easily exit the shelter in an emergency.

Although there are provisions in the Seattle Existing Building Code (SEBC Section 407 and Section 1001.1) indicating that an occupancy change warrants full compliance, other sections allow flexibility for unique circumstances. For existing buildings, SEBC Section 101.11 allows relief from specific requirements that are determined to be impractical, and SEBC Section 101.12 allows the building official to modify the requirements of the code when there are practical difficulties and the modification meets the intent of the code and provides a reasonable degree of safety.

A. Shelter Classification

Shelters are classified as Limited Use Emergency Shelters or Other Emergency Shelters.

Limited Use Emergency Shelters include:

1. Shelters with 20 or fewer beds. Based on the limited occupancy, these shelters do not have limits on the hours of operation or seasonal limits.
2. Shelters with 50 or fewer beds and limited hours of operation.
Example:
 - overnight shelter only and operates year round
 - day center with a seasonal overnight shelter
3. Shelters with 51 to 100 beds provided the following conditions are met:
 - The building is equipped with a sprinkler system throughout; or
 - The shelter is night-time, seasonal use only and there is a combination of building features that enhances life safety such as:
 - Enhanced exiting features including additional exiting capacity beyond what is required by the code and exits with direct access to the outside;
 - Fire alarms; or
 - A noncombustible type of construction.

Shelters that are not Limited Use Emergency Shelter are Other Emergency Shelters.

Other Emergency Shelters include:

1. Day centers with a year round overnight shelter with more than 20 beds;
2. Shelters with fewer than 100 beds that do not meet the Limited Use Emergency Shelter conditions in numbers 2 or 3 above; and
3. Shelters with more than 100 beds

Other Emergency Shelters include any of the following shelter or building characteristics:

1. Extensive alterations are being done to an existing building;
2. The shelter will be located in building that is newly constructed, or as an initial tenant improvement in a new building

All shelters located in a building will be included for the purpose of determining the number of beds for shelter classification. For the purpose of this rule, the number of shelter occupants will be based on one person for each bed designated on the plans. Beds may include mats, cribs or other designated sleeping spaces.

B. Shelter Regulations

Limited Use Emergency Shelters shall meet the following requirements:

1. Egress

- A readily discernible path to two well separated exits from each sleeping area;
- Shelter shall be located within one level of the ground floor;
- Exit lights per Seattle Building Code (SBC) Section 1006;
- Exit signs per SBC 1011; and
- Exit paths for all building occupants shall not be blocked or locked to prevent exiting.

2. Emergency Systems

- Carbon monoxide detectors according to SBC 908.7;
- Interconnected smoke alarms covering the shelter space and adjacent spaces. Battery operated is acceptable. Must be UL listed smoke alarms with sealed non-removable 10-year batteries;
- Class 2A rated fire extinguisher within 75 feet of all portions of the shelter. Additional fire extinguishers as determined by the Seattle Fire Department (SFD); and
- Posting a fire safety and emergency plan according to the Seattle Fire Code (SFC) Section 404 that contains the following:
 - A floor plan or diagram showing emergency egress or escape routes and exits, portable fire extinguishers, and (where provided) areas of refuge, fire alarm manual pulls, control panel, or annunciator;
 - The procedure for reporting a fire (call 9-1-1) or other emergency.
 - The means of notifying occupants of a fire or emergency;
 - Procedures for assisted rescue for persons with disabilities;
 - A procedure for accounting for occupants after evacuation has been completed; and
 - Contact information of personnel or staff who can provide further information or explanation of duties under the plan.

3. Shelter Policies and Operational Standards

The shelter operator shall implement the following policies and operational standards:

- Provide supervision of the shelter through the sleeping hours. Supervision shall ensure continuous and systematic surveillance of the shelter for the purposes of identifying and controlling fire hazards,

detecting early signs of fire, raising an alarm in the event of a fire, and notifying the fire department. The supervision shall include the following:

- Supervision shall be performed by at least one awake, alert adult for every 25 beds. Awake supervision is not required for 10 or fewer beds;
- Supervision shall be performed by a person knowledgeable with shelter policies, the layout of the building and the fire safety and emergency plan;
- Record of this supervision shall be maintained in a log with the time between entries no longer than every 30 minutes;
- Supervision can be provided by a shelter resident, a volunteer, or shelter staff; and
- Supervision may be shared by more than one person through the sleeping hours as long as the supervision is continuous;
- The shelter has a telephone available to call 9-1-1 at all times;
- Use of commercial cooking appliances in the building is not permitted during sleeping hours. Warming ovens or residential-type stove tops used for warming food are allowed during nonsleeping hours;
- Smoking is prohibited inside the building;
- A no tolerance policy shall be in place that prohibits drinking or drug use onsite, threats of violence, or any other criminal activity; and
- Implement operational standards to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities.

4. Occupancy classification

The sleeping area and accessory spaces of a Limited Use Emergency Shelter shall be permitted to have the same occupancy classification as was last permitted for the space. Shelter areas used for assembly purposes will be classified as an assembly occupancy. Where meal preparation is limited to food warming only, the assembly area will be classified as an Assembly Group A-3 occupancy.

5. Pre-application requirements

A walk-through of the proposed shelter space with a representative from SDCI, SFD, and the shelter operator is required prior to permit application.

In addition to the typical SDCI permit submittal requirements the applicant shall include a description of the anticipated use, program synopsis, and operational standards as noted above as part of the permit documents.

Limited Use Emergency Shelter will not require the following:

- Fire sprinklers are not required for the sleeping area and accessory spaces unless required for a new assembly occupancy.
- The HVAC system need not be altered to comply with current code.
- Requirements for change of occupancy in the Seattle Energy Code and the Seattle Mechanical Code need not be met.
- No building envelope improvements will be required for an existing heated space.

Other Emergency Shelters

Other Emergency Shelters in existing buildings shall satisfy the following:

- The sleeping area and any accessory areas of the shelter shall be considered a Residential Group R-1 occupancy;
- The change of occupancy for the sleeping area and any accessory areas of the shelter may trigger substantial alteration requirements per SEBC 303.1.1, item #3. The building shall conform to the requirements of SEBC 303.1;
- The shelter cannot be located in an unreinforced masonry building that has not been retrofitted; and
- All portions of the shelter shall comply with the accessibility provisions in the SEBC.

Other Emergency Shelters in newly-constructed buildings shall satisfy the following:

- The sleeping area and any accessory areas of the shelter will be considered a Residential Group R-1 occupancy; and
- All portions of the shelter shall comply with the Seattle Building Code provisions for new buildings.
- The shelter cannot be located in an unreinforced masonry building that has not been retrofitted; and
- All portions of the shelter shall comply with the accessibility provisions in the SEBC.