



SNOHOMISH REGIONAL FIRE & RESCUE

DIVISION OF FIRE & LIFE SAFETY OFFICE OF THE FIRE MARSHAL

How to Use Tents and Heaters Safely During the Pandemic

Tents can be dangerous if they catch fire or collapse. For this reason, larger tents are regulated by the Fire and Building Codes. Heaters can also pose risks, regardless of how fuel or power is provided. This document presents a summary of code requirements as well as special streamlined permitting and rules in effect during the COVID pandemic.

TENTS

Snohomish Regional Fire and Rescue is issuing free Pandemic Temporary Membrane Structures and Tents permit to businesses and organizations moving services outdoors. A typical example would be outdoor dining or school classrooms. You are eligible for the free permit if you are moving your business or service outdoors due to public health limits on indoor use. You need a Snohomish Regional Fire and Rescue permit for using a temporary tent, canopy, or air-supported structure if:

- The structure is larger than 400 square feet and has one or more walls; OR
- The structure is larger than 700 square feet and open on all sides (roof-only canopies); OR
- An aggregate area of tents or canopies meeting the above requirements with less than 12 feet of separation.

The no-fee permit includes conditions you must follow regarding materials and installation to comply with safety requirements in the fire code. The permit is valid for 180 days from date of issue. If your tent will be used for greater than 180 days, your tent will be required to meet the requirements of the Building Code and other applicable city planning codes.

If you are renting your tent from a tent company, please notify the company if you are eligible for the no-fee permit and check the invoice to ensure they are not inadvertently charging you for any SRFR permit fee. Eligibility criteria: you are moving some of your business or service outdoors due to public health limits on indoor use.

Make Sure Your Tent Can Be Approved by the Fire Marshal

If you are purchasing a tent greater than 400 square feet, please ensure that it meets flame retardant standards in the fire code (see permit condition #8 on the last page). You will be required to accept responsibility and liability for the proper installation of the tent per industry standards and/or manufacturer's installation instructions. Temporary tents should not be occupied during periods of snow or ice accumulation unless designed for full structural loading per the Building Code. Smaller tents should be removed during snow and ice accumulation and wind events. Tents rented through a reputable tent rental company will meet fire code standards and the tent company will assume liability for proper installation.

Should I Choose a Tent Without Walls? For ventilation reasons, the Governor has determined that outdoor dining tents can have zero, one, or two walls. Tents may not have



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more than two walls. According to the fire code, if your tent has no walls, you only need a permit if your tent is larger than 700 square feet, or you have tents side by side closer than 12 feet apart with total area exceeding 700 square feet. However, if you add walls to your tent, then smaller tents will require a permit. If your tent has any walls, a permit is required for tents 400 square feet or greater.

How Close to a Building Can a Tent be Installed? For example, Tents Covering Sidewalk Dining Tables? The Fire Code requires a set-back between tents and buildings of a minimum of 10 feet, primarily to allow access for emergency medical vehicles. However, during the COVID emergency, SRFR will issue permits that allow tents to abut buildings with zero feet of clearance.

What are the Full Permit Conditions for a Temporary Tent? Please see the last page.

OUTDOOR HEATING AND LIGHTING

Fuel Tanks are Not Allowed Inside Tents. This means “mushroom” heaters are allowed 10 feet away from tents and canopies, but are prohibited inside tents. “Salamander” style heaters which blow air in under a tent from the outside are permitted and are usually available from tent rental companies. The fuel tank must be a minimum 10 feet away from the tent and exits and you must have a minimum of one 2A:10BC (5 lbs.) fire extinguisher mounted for every 75 of travel distance.

Electric Heaters and Lighting are allowed outside as well as inside tents and canopies. However, there are some pre-cautions you must take when using extension cords. Electrical cords must be protected from wear and damage and to avoid trip hazards. If you are using an extension cord with your heater, due to the amount of power the heater uses, you must ensure that the cord is a minimum of 12 gauge (or greater if recommended by the manufacturer). Extension cords should not be connected into each other and should never pass through holes in walls. Any significant electrical outlet must remain covered. This applies to junction boxes, circuit breaker panels, and any type of outlet box.

For more information please contact the SRFR Division of Fire & Life Safety – Office of the Fire Marshal at riskreduction@snofire7.org or (360) 794-7666 option 2.



PERMIT CONDITIONS

Note: These conditions are for Pandemic Temporary Membrane Structures and Tents permits issued during COVID emergency operations and are subject to change once COVID emergency operations are no longer in effect.

1. **Standards.** New temporary membrane structures and tents shall be erected in accordance with the International Fire Code 2015 Edition Chapter 31.
2. **Exits.** Exits shall be spaced at approximately equal intervals around the perimeter of the tent or membrane structure, and shall be located such that all points are 100 feet or less from an exit. The number of exits and required width shall be no less than the requirements of table 3103.12.2 of the IFC.

MINIMUM NUMBER OF MEANS OF EGRESS AND MEANS OF EGRESS WIDTHS FROM TEMPORARY MEMBRANE STRUCTURES AND TENTS

OCCUPANT LOAD	MINIMUM NUMBER OF MEANS OF EGRESS	MINIMUM WIDTH OF EACH MEANS OF EGRESS (inches)	
		Tent	Membrane Structure
10 to 199	2	72	36
200 to 499	3	72	72
500 to 999	4	96	72
1,000 to 1,999	5	120	96
2,000 to 2,999	6	120	96
Over 3,000 ^a	7	120	96

3. **Aisles.** The width of aisles without fixed seating shall be in accordance with the following:
 - a. In areas serving employees only, the minimum aisle width shall be 24 inches.
 - b. In public areas, smooth-surfaced, unobstructed aisles having a minimum width of not less than 44 inches.
4. **Exit signs.** Exits shall be clearly marked. Exit signs shall be installed at required exit doorways and where otherwise necessary to indicate clearly the direction of egress where the exit serves an occupant load of 50 or more. Exit signs shall be illuminated and meet the requirements of UL 924.
5. **Label and Certification.** Membrane structures or tents shall have a permanently affixed label bearing the identification of size and fabric or material type. An affidavit or affirmation shall be submitted to the fire code official and a copy retained on the premises on which the tent or air-supported structure is located. The affidavit shall attest to all of the following information relative to the flame propagation performance criteria of the fabric:
 - a. Names and address of the owners of the tent or air-supported



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- structure.
- b. Date the fabric was last treated with flame-retardant solution.
 - c. Trade name or kind of chemical used in treatment.
 - d. Name of person or firm treating the material.
 - e. Name of testing agency and test standard by which the fabric was tested.
6. **Smoking.** Smoking shall not be permitted in tents or membrane structures. Approved “No Smoking” signs shall be conspicuously posted.
 7. **Open or exposed flame.** Open flame or other devices emitting flame, fire or heat or any flammable or combustible liquids, gas, charcoal or other cooking device or any other unapproved devices shall not be permitted inside or located within 20 feet of the tent or membrane structures while open to the public.
 8. **Portable fire extinguishers.** Portable fire extinguishers shall be provided so that one extinguisher is located within 75 feet of all portions of the tent or canopy. Extinguishers shall be mounted at no higher than 5 feet and they shall have a minimum rating of 2A:10BC.
 9. **Location of LP-gas containers.** LP-gas containers shall be located outside. Required separation distance is as follows:
 - a. 500 gallons or less- 10 feet
 - b. Greater than 500 gallons- 25 feet
 10. **Separation of generators.** Generators and other internal combustion power sources shall be separated from tents or membrane structures by not less than 20 feet and shall be isolated from contact with the public by fencing, enclosure or other approved means.
 11. **Combustible vegetation and waste.** Combustible vegetation that could create a fire hazard shall be removed from the area occupied by a tent or membrane structure, and from areas within 30 feet of such structures.