

2.11 Submittal Guidelines for Emergency Evacuation Signs (2025)

Reference: California Code of Regulations Title 19 Section 3.09, California Health and Safety Code Section 13220, 2025 SFFC Section 404.2.3.2

Purpose: The purpose of developing comprehensive guidelines is to provide consistent methods to assist designers in attaining rapid approval of proposed signage, and to explain the approval process for these signs.

Scope: The guidelines in this administrative bulletin shall apply to both new buildings and the replacement of signs in existing buildings where evacuation signs are required. Previously approved signs in existing buildings may remain unless floor remodeling results in the sign having incorrect information. Existing signs that can be modified to clearly denote minor changes may remain as well. The information provided herein details the San Francisco Fire Department's minimum requirements for emergency evacuation signs. Any additional information provided will be reviewed on a case by case basis prior to approval. Note that additional information may not be desirable as it can complicate the sign and add confusion.

Scale and Documentation: When permit plans are submitted for emergency evacuation signs, the plans shall be drawn to an indicated scale (not smaller than $1/8" = 1'$) with a graphic scale indication. All fonts on all sheets shall be a minimum 1/8" font size. All plans shall be of uniform size (11" x 17" minimum), with a plan of each floor. Plans must be clear with legible text and symbols so they could be electronically scanned. For Electronic Plan Review (EPR) via Bluebeam: The applicant shall follow all DBI specific requirements for EPR submission and shall provide all the required information included in this section in electronic format. The requirements of this bulletin shall apply to both paper plans and EPR submittals.

Approval Process: Prior to fabrication the layout of the sign must be approved by the San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD) Plan Check Division. Evacuation signs for construction projects which have any amount of public funding, involve buildings owned or leased by the city, or projects being funded or enabled by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, the Mayor's Office of Community Investment, or the Mayor's Office of Housing must also be reviewed by the Mayor's Office on Disability (MOD). Designers should note that MOD may have more stringent requirements, and should consult with representatives from that agency prior to designing signage for these occupancies.

I. WHERE & WHAT CONTENT IS REQUIRED

1. **Low Rise Office Buildings.** Office buildings 2 or more stories in height, except high-rise buildings, shall have one of the following:
 - A. **Information Handout.** Provide an approved emergency procedures information handout (pamphlet, brochure, or leaflet) available upon entering the building that provides the same information required for evacuation signage.
 - B. **Evacuation Signs.** Provide evacuation signs (floor plans) as detailed in the submittal guidelines below. Signs shall be posted under the following areas:
 - (1) Entrances to Required Exit Stairs.
 - (2) Every Elevator Landing/Lobby.
 - (3) Immediately Inside All Public Entrances to the Building.

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Exception: On a case-by-case basis, and where the elevator lobby is located near the entrance to the building, the omission of the sign at the building entry may be approved at the discretion of the plan reviewer.

2. **High-Rise Office Buildings.** The following conditions shall apply for high-rise office buildings:

- A. **List of Tenants.** Owners/operators of high-rise buildings shall maintain a list of all permanent tenants who have special emergency evacuation needs. This list shall indicate the permanent work location of these individuals. The list shall be available in the building manager's office, or other location approved by the Department.
- B. **Evacuation Signs.** Provide evacuation signage (floor plans) as detailed in the submittal guidelines below. Signs shall be posted under the following areas:
 - (1) Entrances to Required Exit Stairs.
 - (2) Every Elevator Landing.
 - (3) Immediately Inside All Public Entrances to the Building.

Exception: On a case-by-case basis, and where the elevator lobby is located near the entrance to the building, the omission of the sign at the building entry may be approved at the discretion of the plan reviewer.

3. **Hotels, Motels, Lodging Houses.** The following conditions shall apply for hotels, motels, and lodging houses:

- A. **Alternatives for Low Vision.** People who are blind or have low vision shall receive instructions of a type they can utilize (such as audio taped instructions or large print format).
- B. **Roster for Those Needing Assistance.** The management shall provide a place on the registration so that guests with disabilities may be identified who require special emergency evacuation assistance. A roster listing rooms assigned to these guests shall be kept at the registration desk.
- C. **Evacuation Signs.** Provide evacuation signage (floor plans) as detailed in the submittal guidelines below. Signs shall be posted under the following areas:
 - (1) Entrances to Required Exit Stairs.
 - (2) Every Elevator Landing/Lobby.
 - (3) Immediately Inside All Public Entrances to the Building.
 - (4) Every Guest Room with the following conditions:
 - a. The emergency procedure information shall be printed on a floor plan and posted on the interior of or immediately adjacent to the entry door to the room.
 - b. This floor plan shall be posted with its bottom edge at approximately, but not more than 4 feet from the floor.

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4. **Apartment Houses.** The following conditions shall apply for apartment houses two stories or more in height that contain three or more dwelling units, and where the front door opens into an interior hallway or an interior lobby area:
 - A. **Emergency Procedures.** The owner/operator shall provide specific emergency procedures to be followed in the event of fire, including procedures for persons with mobility disabilities.
 - B. **Evacuation Signs.** Provide evacuation signage (floor plans) as detailed in the submittal guidelines below. Signs shall be posted under the following areas:
 - (1) All Hallway Intersections.
 - (2) An Intermediate Point of Any Hallway Exceeding 100 Feet in Length.
 - (3) Every Elevator Landing/Lobby.
 - (4) Immediately Inside All Public Entrances to the Building.

Exception: On a case-by-case basis, and where the elevator lobby is located near the entrance to the building, the omission of the sign at the building entry may be approved at the discretion of the plan reviewer.

II. SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS (THE FOLLOWING ITEMS MUST BE INCLUDED ON THE PLANS)

1. **Owner/Occupant Information.** Name(s) and Phone Number(s) of Owner and Occupant / Tenant.
2. **Address Information.** Address of Building, Including Assessor's Block and Lot Number.
3. **Contractor Information.** Contractor's Name, Address, Telephone Number, and License Number.
4. **Scale and Documentation.** Two sets of conceptual drawings shall be drawn to an indicated scale with all fonts on the plans, on sheets of uniform size (11" x 17" minimum). Plans must be clear with legible text and symbols so they could be electronically scanned. The signs may be reduced on the submittal plans provided the minimum sheet size is 11" X 17" and the finished dimensions of the sign are shown on the plan. The scope of work must be indicated in detail. Changes or alterations to signs or tenant spaces will require submission of revised drawings. The emergency evacuation signs permit shall be a "FIRE" permit only.
5. **Architectural Reference.** A copy of the most current approved architectural plan(s) for the floor or floors for which signage is being submitted. When no approved plans are available, this item may be omitted.

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6. **Floor Plan on Drawings.** A floor plan, for all floors where signs are to be installed, shall be provided showing the exact location of the sign installation including an elevation view showing the height of the sign above the finished floor; Bottom edge of sign shall be not more than 48" above the floor per Title 19.
7. **Typical Configuration.** A single sign may be submitted that shows a typical configuration, when applicable, for multiple floors with a descriptor "TYP FLOORS 1-5". Each finished sign must indicate the actual floor it serves. When this option is used, a textural note adjacent to the "YOU ARE HERE" symbol shall state that the finished sign will have the symbol in the appropriate location.
8. **Emergency Evacuation Sign Specifications and Information.** The signs shall comply with all of the following specifications and information:
 - A. **Standard for Informational and Directional Signs.** Signs shall comply with standards for informational and directional signs in the California Building Code regarding non-glare surfaces, high contrast between text and symbols and background, and non-decorative typestyles.
 - B. **Directional Arrow.** A directional arrow pointing "North" shall be provided.
 - C. **Frame or Header and Footer Strip.** Signs shall either be enclosed by a frame a minimum of 1/2" wide or have a header and footer color strip a minimum of 1/2" wide that contrasts both with the wall on which the plan is mounted and with the plan background.
 - D. **Text Width.** All text shall have a stroke width which is a minimum of 20 percent of character height.
 - E. **Uppercase/Lowercase Text.** All text shall be in uppercase text or upper and lower case, except for the admonition to use the stairs instead of the elevator, which shall be all uppercase.
 - F. **Text Information.** The following specifications shall apply for the text information required to be provided on the emergency evacuation signs:
 - (1) **Header.** Signs shall have a solid header with the text "EVACUATION PLAN" in contrasting uppercase letters no less than 3/4" in height.
 - (2) **Address and Floor.** Signs shall include the building address and the represented floor.
 - (3) **Persons with Disabilities.** Instructions to persons with disabilities shall be represented with a minimum 5/8" font for the words "PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES" with the remainder of the instruction in minimum 3/8" font. The text "PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES" shall be accentuated by a solid band background with contrasting text, solid lines above and below the text, or other approved method to emphasize the text.

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The information shall direct people with disabilities, instructing them what to do and/or where to go in the event of an emergency. Such information shall include reference to areas of safe refuge and/or other areas where assistance for such individuals will be available (for example, where evacuation devices for people with mobility impairments are located), if the building has such areas. The locations of these areas should be depicted on the evacuation sign floor plan.

- (4) **Emergencies.** The text "CALL 911 FOR FIRE/POLICE/MEDICAL" and the admonition to use the stairs instead of the elevator (unless the building is equipped with elevators for self-evacuation) in the event of an emergency shall be a minimum of 5/8" font. The text "DURING EMERGENCIES USE EMERGENCY PHONES" shall be accentuated by a solid band background with light or white colored text, solid lines above and below the text, or other approved method to emphasize the text.

- (5) **Fire Alarm Sound.** If the building has a fire alarm system, what the audible component of the fire alarm sounds like and what the visual component of the fire alarm looks like. Information regarding the appearance and sound of the fire alarm, if one is required, shall be a minimum of 3/16" high in upper and lower case text.

G. **Floor Plan Information.** The following information shall apply to the floor plan on the emergency evacuation sign:

- (1) **Floor Plan Color and Size.** Plans shall have a background of white, off-white, or warm white with black or dark gray (minimum 75% contrast) text. Floor plan and corridors shall be outlined with a black stroke a minimum of 1/16" width.
- (2) **Street Labels.** The floor plan shall include street labels for any streets that border the building and shall be a minimum 1/4" high font in all upper case text.
- (3) **Enclosed Areas, Corridors, and Doors.** The floor plan shall have all enclosed areas lightly shaded, without interior walls or details. Corridors shall be a minimum of 1/2" wide. Exit doors along the exit route shall be represented architecturally, in the direction of opening. This includes horizontal exits.
- (4) **Additional Areas.** The floor plan shall include additional areas where assistance for people with mobility impairments will be available if the building has such areas (such as evacuation devices for people with mobility impairments are located).
- (5) **Orientation.** Floor plans shall be oriented to the position of the viewer.
- (6) **Symbol Legend.** All symbols used on the plan shall be included in the symbols legend.
- (7) **Key Labels and Symbols.** The following specifications shall apply for key labels and symbols on the floor plan:
 - a. **Key Labels.** Floor plan key labels shall be a minimum of 3/16" high in upper and lower case text. Symbols in the plan key shall have a width, height, or diameter of at least 5/8".

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- b. **Exit Symbol.** The floor plan shall include the location to the exits. All exits to the exterior shall be marked and represented by a green rectangle with the word "EXIT" in white and in uppercase characters of at least 3/16" high enclosed within.
- c. **Exit Route.** The floor plan shall include the route to the exit. Arrowhead symbols indicating the exit route shall be a minimum of 1/4" wide at its base, and the stroke on the path of travel symbols shall be a minimum of 1/8" wide. Each arrow symbol shall be a nominal 3/8" long from tip to end of stroke, and 1/8" shall separate each arrow from the next. The exit route shall be represented by a bright green arrow followed by a series of bright green dashed lines.
- d. **Exit Stairs Symbol.** The floor plan shall include exit stairs if the building has exit stairs. Symbols on the floor plan for exit stairs shall have a width, height, or diameter of at least 1/2". The stroke on the symbols for the exit stairs shall be a minimum of 1/16" wide. Exit stairs shall be represented by a series of a minimum of six parallel bright green lines, bisected by one green line.
- e. **Elevator Symbol.** The floor plan shall include elevators if the building has elevators. Symbols on the floor plan for elevators shall have a width, height, or diameter of at least 1/2". The stroke on the symbols for the elevators shall be a minimum of 1/16" wide. Elevators shall be represented by a rectangle outlined in black except at the door opening, and shaded in gray, with black diagonal lines crossing to each corner.
- f. **Area of Refuge Symbol.** The floor plan shall include areas of refuge if the building is required to have such areas. Symbols on the floor plan for areas of refuge shall have a width, height, or diameter of at least 1/2". Areas of refuge shall be represented by a "Federal Blue" square with radius corners with a white International Symbol of Accessibility enclosed within. (Note: The ISA symbol shall also be included elsewhere on the plan to accompany any additional text that gives special instructions for evacuation to persons who cannot use stairways during an emergency).
- g. **"You are Here" Symbol.** The floor plan shall include the location of the viewer through a "You are Here" symbol. The "You are Here" symbol shall have a diameter of at least 5/8". It shall be represented by a goldenrod-colored circle with a black symbolic representation of a human figure enclosed within.
- h. **Fire Alarm Pull Station Symbol.** The floor plan shall include fire alarm pull stations if the building is required to have a fire alarm system. Symbols on the floor plan for fire alarm pull stations shall have a width, height, or diameter of at least 1/2". The location of fire alarm pull stations shall be represented by a bright red square with radius corners with a white bold uppercase letter "A" enclosed within.

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- i. **Call Box/Emergency Phone Symbol.** The floor plan shall include the location of the two-way emergency communication system call boxes and/or emergency phones if the building has them. Symbols on the floor plan for the call boxes/emergency phones shall have a width, height, or diameter of at least 1/2". The location of the call boxes/ emergency phones shall be represented by a red square with a white phone enclosed within.
- j. **Fire Extinguishers Symbol.** The floor plan shall include the location of fire extinguishers if the building is required to have fire extinguishers. Symbols on the floor plan for the fire extinguishers shall have a width, height, or diameter of at least 1/2".

9. **Variations.** Plans for submittal shall be permitted to have the following variations:

- A. **Black and White Signs.** Black and white emergency evacuation signs will be accepted, provided the colors of the symbols on the finished signs are designated with a text notation.
- B. **Text Size.** The text sizes may be described with a text notation.

III. ADDITIONAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Designers of evacuation signage shall be aware of the following items:

- 1. **Locked Elevator Lobbies.** Exit paths for tenant spaces shall not pass through locked elevator lobbies.
- 2. **Requests for Locking Elevator Lobbies.** Requests for Locking Subsequent requests to lock elevator lobby doors after evacuation sign approval and or installation will require evacuation signage to be verified for accuracy.
- 3. **Fire Inspector Meeting.** Although not mandatory, the designer may elect to meet with the district Fire inspector prior to fabrication of the sign at the jobsite to verify that the layout and orientation of the sign are correct. This is highly recommended when the plan submittal does not include the approved architectural plans.
- 4. **Final Approval.** Prior to final approval of the building permit, a District Fire Inspector will inspect the installation, verifying that the signage is representative of the actual floor plan and consistent with the submittal. After the sign is installed, you may request an inspection at (415) 554-8927.

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Figure 1: Building with Call Boxes/Phones, No Fire Alarm Boxes, and No Areas of Refuge (Sample)

EVACUATION PLAN

555 BIRCH TREE ST - FLOOR 2



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Figure 2: Building with Fire Alarm Boxes, Call Boxes/Phones, and Areas of Refuge (Sample)

EVACUATION PLAN

555 BIRCH TREE ST - FLOOR 2



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Figure 3: Building with Occupant Evacuation Elevators, Call Boxes/Phones, No Fire Alarm Boxes, and No Areas of Refuge (Sample)

EVACUATION PLAN

555 BIRCH TREE ST - FLOOR 2

