



# Office of the Fire Marshal Williamson County, Texas



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## Inspection of Foster Care Facilities Guidance

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### PURPOSE

Foster care providers (providers) are required by Chapter 749.2903 of the Texas Administrative Code Title 40, Social Services & Assistance, Part 19, Department of Family and Protective Services to have fire safety inspections. For those providers living in unincorporated areas of the State, that is outside of the city limits, the Williamson County has adopted the International Fire Code 2018 which will be the applicable standard in the absence of the adoption of a local fire code by the applicable authority. State Law permits cities, counties, and Emergency Services Districts (ESD) to adopt its own fire codes. In this case the adopted city, county or ESD fire code will be applicable. Cities in the state, for the most part, will use the "International Fire Code" as the standard for inspections. Based upon whether the cities, counties, and ESDs have adopted their own code, the entities will apply the respective fire code to foster care facilities within their particular jurisdiction. Foster care providers should be aware that local authorities having jurisdiction may vary in their respective interpretations.

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### SCOPE

This guideline is intended to provide the minimum requirements necessary for review and approval of licensed care facilities located within the jurisdiction of Williamson County. Licensed Foster Homes with less than four (4) children do not require a fire sprinkler or an automatic fire alarm system (NFPA 72). Foster Group Homes falls into the definition of a Residential Board and Care Occupancy if the home houses more than three foster children not related to the providers. Fire protection system standards vary between existing and new foster group homes. Each property will be required to submit for an application for inspection.

If four or more children reside in the Foster Home, the home is defined as a "Residential Board and Care Occupancy," and a site inspection by a certified fire safety inspector is required. Additional or modified fire safety requirements may apply. If the answer to this question is "No," you may contact the County Fire Marshal's Office for assistance.

Children must be capable of self-evacuation and be without any primary medical needs. No more than two infants (up to 24 months) may reside at the home and an emergency evacuation and relocation plan, as required by General Residential Operations rule §748.3231, must specifically provide for the evacuation of all residents in less than three minutes.

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### FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Licensed Foster Homes with less than four (4) children that have **prompt** or **slow** evacuation shall have interconnected smoke detectors (each bedroom and hallway near bedrooms). In multi-story homes, the smoke detector that covers the upper floor(s), in addition to those required in sleeping rooms, should usually be located at the top of the stairs. The detector(s) should be mounted according to manufacturer's instructions.

Licensed Foster Homes with less than four (4) children that have an **impractical** evacuation shall have interconnected smoke detectors (each bedroom and hallway near bedrooms) that is installed by a state-

licensed Residential Fire Alarm Superintendent (RAS) or Fire Alarm Planning Superintendent (APS) contractor. This system shall be monitored by a licensed monitoring company.

Foster Group Homes with four (4) to eight (8) children that have **prompt** evacuation shall have interconnected smoke detectors (each bedroom and hallway near bedrooms) that is installed by a state-licensed RAS or APS contractor. This system shall be monitored by a licensed monitoring company.

Foster Group Homes with four (4) to eight (8) children that have **slow** or **impractical** evacuation shall have an automatic fire alarm system compliant with NFPA 72 that is installed by a state-licensed contractor. This type of facility shall also have an automatic fire sprinkler system compliant with NFPA 13D; 13R; or 13 installed by a state-licensed contractor. The fire alarm and sprinkler contractor(s) are required to submit their plans to Williamson County Fire Marshal's Office for review and permitting.

Foster Group Homes with nine (9) or more children will need to meet requirements for Residential Board and Care Occupancy.

**Prompt Evacuation** is defined as when everyone in the home can evacuate in 3 minutes or less.

**Slow Evacuation** is defined as when everyone in the home can evacuate in 13 minutes or less.

**Impractical** is defined as when evacuation in the home takes longer than 13 minutes.

***Please fill out Williamson County Fire Marshal's License Verification Form before applying for a Foster Home Inspection.***

Please provide a fire extinguisher (2A-10B:C) with a current inspection tag in the kitchen area and on the second floor if applicable.

If a foster home as a NFPA compliant system, it will require an annual fire safety inspection from Williamson County Fire Marshal's Office.

If a foster home does not have a NFPA compliant system, it will require a fire safety inspection every two years.

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## **EGRESS (EXIT) REQUIREMENTS**

Every sleeping room and every living and dining area shall be provided with access to a secondary means of escape to the outside of the home in addition to the front or back doors. The purpose of the secondary means of escape is to provide an occupant with an alternate escape route when fire or another emergency blocks the primary exit from the Foster Home.

Three types of secondary means of escape that are permitted:

(A) A door that opens to the outside.

OR

(B) The use of an readily operable window in the sleeping rooms and living areas of the home that provides an opening of not less than 5.7 sq. ft. in area, minimum of 20 inches wide and 24 inches high, and the bottom of the opening no higher than 44 inches above the floor, located within 20 ft. of grade accessible to fire department apparatus.

OR

(C) Every sleeping room and living area without a secondary means of escape (as described in A or B above), has a passage, other than the hallway, to another room that has a means of escape as described in A or B above. The passage must not have any doors that can be locked. An example would be two bedrooms or living areas directly connected with a passage or door. A shared bathroom connecting two living area or sleeping rooms usually will not be acceptable because one or both doors could be locked, preventing passage from one room to the other.

Note: There are two exceptions to the requirement for secondary means of escape from each bedroom or living area: (1) if the bedroom or living area has a door opening directly to the outside of the building, or (2) where the Foster Home is protected throughout by an approved automatic fire sprinkler system.

No Foster Home may have any interior door used in a path of escape that can be locked.

Primary exit doors and secondary means of escape, such as windows, and security bars that require a key, opening tool or special knowledge (security code, combination) are prohibited. Several multiple-death fires have occurred when a door lock could not be released because the key could not be found. The prohibition on these types of locks applies only to those doors or windows that are part of the required primary and secondary exits.

The requirement for a child being able to open a closet door from the inside is to ensure that the child cannot accidentally become locked inside.

Children will often lock themselves in the bathroom. Provisions for unlocking the doors from the outside will facilitate rescue by other occupants or by fire department personnel.

An attic room, for example, accessible only by a trap door or folding ladder, would not have an approved primary means of escape. A standard set of stairs to access the room would be required. Spiral staircases are also inadequate.

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### **MECHINCAL (HVAC) SYSTEMS**

Un-vented heaters that bear the mark or label of an approved testing firm and are installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and applicable safety codes are acceptable. Some older un-vented heaters are not equipped with vents to the outside of the home. These heaters depend on regular maintenance, proper adjustment, and an adequate air supply for proper combustion. Un-vented heaters can release lethal carbon monoxide into the home, deplete the oxygen levels in the home to dangerous limits, or provide an ignition source for a fire.

All gas appliances must be equipped with metal tubing and connectors, no rubber hoses. Please have the licensed plumber fill out ***Williamson County Gas System Test Report*** before applying for a Foster Home Inspection; if there is natural gas or propane supplied to the home.

All gas-fired heaters, including any central heating unit, should be inspected annually by a qualified person to ensure the unit is in proper working order to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Please have the qualified technician fill out ***Williamson County Fire Marshal's HVAC System Report*** before applying for a Foster Home Inspection.

Install Carbon Monoxide detectors outside of bedrooms (on all floors) if there are gas-fired heater(s) or central heating units are in the home.

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### **ELECTRICAL SYSTEM**

Please have a qualified Electrician fill out ***Williamson County Fire Marshal's Electrical System Report*** before applying for a Foster Home Inspection.

Extension cords are to be used on a temporary basis only. When the cords remain plugged in, they become part of the building wiring system. No frayed or spliced appliance cords are permitted because of the danger of a short circuit. All unused openings in the electrical circuit breaker box must be covered to prevent any material from encountering energized electrical wires.

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## **GENERAL FIRE SAFETY**

There should be no storage of any item that could burn (boxes, paper, clothing, wood scraps, blankets/pillows) near stoves, heaters, fireplaces, or other sources of flame or heat, including the gas water heater closets or other gas fired appliances.

It is important to provide safeguards to protect children from the hot surfaces of heating equipment. Children do not always understand the dangers of hot surfaces. Screens (barriers) that prevent children from accessing heating equipment must be of closely spaced wire or expanded metal and must be securely attached to parts of the building to prevent movement.

All matches and or lighters must be out of the reach of children. Children playing with matches and/or cigarette lighters cause many deaths and millions of dollars in damage each year.

Flammable liquids (gasoline) shall be in an approved metal container or in a lockage storage container in the back yard or garage.

Home fire escape plans are essential to enable all residents to know what to do when the smoke alarm sounds, or other signs of fire are present. Home fire escape plans must rehearse by all occupants each month to remain effective. The plan should enable all family members to escape using primary or secondary exits. A safe location outside the home should be selected for a gathering point, well away from the dangers of the fire or responding emergency vehicles.

Please provide an evacuation map, plan, and fire drill record for review in a three-ring binder. Williamson County Fire Marshal's Office recommends performing fire drills monthly.

Please provide a smoke detector and carbon monoxide check sheets in the three-ring binder. Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors need to be tested once a month. Please notated when the batteries were changed, they need to be changed out at least once a year.

**NOTE: The above requirements set a minimum standard for fire safety in the home. Special situations and circumstances may call for increased fire safety requirements above those detailed above. You may request assistance from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services if you have any questions. The Williamson Fire Marshal's Office may be contacted to interpret fire safety requirements.**