

February 15, 2005

FIRE CODE REVIEWS OF DELEGATED CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive establishes the minimum requirements for reviews must be conducted of delegated construction projects to ensure compliance with all applicable fire protection code and standards; and establishes requirements for project designers for selected delegated construction projects.

2. BACKGROUND

a. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) acts as its own building and fire protection official and Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ). All Federal agencies constructing and renovating structures and facilities on Federal property are generally exempt from local building and fire codes and standards. In addition, Federal government construction projects are generally exempt from fire code compliance reviews by local fire officials. Therefore, VA must have a system to ensure that this critical function is conducted. VA's AHJ for ensuring fire code compliance is the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N).

b. Additional background information governing code compliance on VA construction projects can be found in Public Law 100-678, Public Buildings Amendments Act of 1988, and the Office of and the Chief Network Officer memo dated November 15, 1996, on Construction Project Fire Code Compliance Process.

c. Delegated construction projects include projects funded from the Major, Minor, or Non-Recurring and Maintenance (NRM) programs that are managed at the facility level and other projects completed with local operating funds.

d. VA general requirements addressing construction code and standards are found in the Office of Facility Management document Program Guide (PG) 18-3, Topic 1, Code and Standards (see website: http://vaww.va.gov/facmgt/standard/cpro/cp_top01.doc). VA is required to comply with national consensus codes and standards. Specific VA requirements for fire protection can be found in the VA Fire Protection Design Manual.

e. VA requirements for Architectural and/or Engineering (A/E) services are contained in numerous Office of Facility Management documents. For selected delegated projects involving significant fire code applications, a fire protection engineering discipline is necessary to design, or assist in the design, of projects to ensure adequate fire code compliance.

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that all delegated construction projects must be provided fire code reviews, as needed, at appropriate stages in the design and construction phases of the project by qualified individuals to ensure compliance with VA referenced fire codes and standards; and that fire protection engineering firms or expertise be part of the design and construction of selected projects as part of the A/E team.

THIS VHA DIRECTIVE EXPIRES FEBRUARY 28, 2010

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4. ACTION

a. **Network Director.** Each Network Director is responsible for:

(1) Establishing a network policy on fire protection and life safety code reviews which must ensure that all delegated construction projects are designed, constructed, and reviewed to meet all applicable VA fire code requirements.

(2) Ensuring that each facility implements the requirements of VHA policy.

b. **Facility Director.** Each facility Director is responsible for ensuring that:

(1) A special fire protection and life safety code review is conducted on all delegated Major and Minor projects and any NRM project where the scope of work is primarily (greater than 50 percent of the total project cost) fire protection (i.e., fire alarm or sprinkler systems, etc.) or includes significant renovation and construction where specific fire code and standard requirements would be applicable.

(2) For these special fire protection and life safety reviews, a qualified individual conducts the review. A Network VHA safety and fire protection engineer would be a qualified individual. Other qualified individuals would be an external third-party Fire Protection Engineer knowledgeable of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) National Fire Codes and knowledgeable of exit calculations, sprinkler system and fire alarm system requirements, Life Safety Code requirements, etc.

(3) For all other delegated projects other than as described, fire code reviews are conducted at the facility by the facility safety officer and others, as needed.

(4) Sufficient reviews are conducted as needed at various stages of design and construction to ensure fire code compliance, but a minimum of one review is required prior to construction contract award.

(5) A fire protection engineering firm or expertise is part of the design and construction of selected projects as part of the A/E team. All delegated Major and Minor projects, unless exempted by the Network Director, and any NRM projects where the scope of work is primarily (greater than 50 percent of the total project cost) fire protection (i.e., fire alarm or sprinkler systems, etc.) must use a fire protection engineer (see subpar. 5e for specific qualifications).

(6) A local policy is established in accordance with VHA policy and in compliance with appropriate Network policies. Policies must include requirements that individuals have specific responsibility for conducting fire code plan reviews.

(7) A facility Chief Engineer, or comparable qualified position, is responsible for:

(a) Ensuring that appropriate Office of Facility Management fire protection requirements are incorporated into each delegated project.

(b) Forwarding selected projects to the appropriate Network staff, or designated third-party reviewer, and that these projects are in accordance with Network policy.

(c) Ensuring that fire code plan reviews are conducted, as needed, and in accordance with VHA policy.

5. REFERENCES

a. Public Law 100-678, "Public Buildings Amendments Act of 1988."

b. Office of Facility Management PG-18-3, Topic 1, Codes and Standards.

c. VA Fire Protection Design Manual.

d. Chief Network Officer memo dated November 15, 1996, on Construction Project Fire Code Compliance Process.

e. Office of Facility Management document: Qualifications and Scope of Services for Project Fire Protection Engineer, dated March 1996.

f. Additional information on contract services for fire code plan review can be found on the Center for Engineering and Occupational Safety and Health web site at - <http://vaww.ceosh.med.va.gov/>.

g. Information on VA's design and construction requirements can be found at: <http://vaww.va.gov/facmgt>.

6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES: The Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions can be referred to the Director, Safety and Technical Service at 202-273-5844 or the Director, Health Care Engineering at 202-273-5644.

7. RESCISSIONS: None. This VHA Directive expires February 28, 2010.

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