

Fire Safety Unit

Guidelines for the Use of Tents/Special Events

TENTS

RULES AND GUIDELINES

Assistance in the compliance of the University of Rochester's requirement policy is available from the Environmental Health & Safety's (EH&S) Fire Marshal's Office.

Phone: (585) 275-3243

Fax: (585) 274-0001

Inspection

The EH&S Fire Marshal's Office shall inspect all tents to determine compliance with this guideline. Any violations of the Fire Code or Building Code of New York State must be corrected prior to the tent approval or immediately if discovered during the event.

Required Permits

Any use of propane will require a permit for the propane and the tent issued by the City of Rochester Fire Department. To obtain this permit contact City of Rochester's Fire Marshal's Office at (585) 428-3680.

Flame Resistance and Structure

All tents must be flame resistant. A certificate or other proof of approval by a testing laboratory is acceptable as evidence of the required fire resistance. A copy of the certificate must be provided to EH&S's Fire Marshal's Office. Certificates are generally available from the tent supplier. As a minimum, the certificate shall have the following:

1. Name and address of the owners of the tent.
2. Date the fabric was last treated.
3. Trade name or kind of chemical used in treatment.
4. Name of person or firm treating the material.
5. Name of testing agency and test standard.

Combustible Material

The area enclosed by any tent and not less than 20 feet outside of such tent must be cleared of all flammable, combustible material or vegetation prior to erecting the tent and the duration of its use. No hay, straw, shavings, or similar combustible materials are permitted within any tent unless they have been treated to make them flame retardant and a certificate or similar proof is supplied to the EH&S department prior to its placing. Certificates may be obtained from the manufacturer or supplier. Combustible trash shall be removed at least once a day during the period the tent is occupied.

Smoking

Smoking shall not be permitted in tents. "No Smoking" signs shall be conspicuously posted.

Open or Exposed Flame

Open flame or other devices emitting flame, fire, heat or any flammable or combustible liquids, gas, charcoal or other cooking devices shall not be permitted inside or located within 20 feet of the tent. Device(s) must have a dedicated 10 pound multipurpose fire extinguisher within 25 feet.

Lighting

Spot or effect lighting shall only be by electricity and all combustible construction located within 6 feet of such equipment shall be protected by non-combustible insulation.

Exits and Occupant Load for Enclosed Tents

Tents that have sides attached and rolled up or are capable of being enclosed must meet these requirements even if it is intended for the tent to remain unenclosed during the event. The number of separate exits required for enclosed tents is based on the floor area of the tent. The maximum number of occupants, called the occupant load, is also based on the floor area of the tent.

Occupant load (floor area of tent)	Number of exits (minimum)	Minimum width/exit (inches)
Between 10 to 199	2	72
Between 200 (1400 SF) & 499 (3493 SF)	3	72
Between 500 (3500 SF) & 999 (6993 SF)	4	96
More than 1000 (7000 SF)	5 (more may be needed)	120

The occupant load is decreased when tables and chairs are used (banquet style) – the number of required exits remains the same because exits are based on floor area. The following calculations will determine the occupant load with tables and chairs.

Net square footage of tent floor area/15 = occupant load with tables and chairs

Example: The number of occupants allowed, with tables and chairs, in a 50 x 50' tent with a 10' x 20' stage.

2,500 square feet (floor area) – 200 square feet (stage area)/15 = 153 persons

Please Note: These calculations are for planning purposes only and do not represent a legal capacity. The EH&S's Fire Marshal's Office will provide legal capacities based on submitted set-up plans.

Exit Signs

Each exit must be provided with an exit sign. The word "EXIT" must be plainly legible in letters at least 6 inches high and with strokes not less than 3/4 inches wide. If the tent is to be occupied after sunset, the exit sign shall be self-illuminated or lit by emergency lighting. Emergency

lighting must be provided if the tent is to be occupied after hours. In most cases, the tent company can provide exit signs and emergency lighting. Exit signs shall be installed at required exit doorways and where otherwise necessary as determined by the Fire Marshal to indicate clearly the direction of egress.

Exit Requirements for All Tents

- There shall be a minimum clearance of at least 3 feet between the fabric envelope and the inside contents.
- Exits shall be spaced at approximately equal intervals around the perimeter of the tent.
- Exits shall be located such that all points are 100 feet or less to an exit.
- The minimum width of an exit must not be less than 72 inches.
- Guy wires or guy ropes must not cross an exit at a height of less than 7 feet.
- Where tents are placed near fences or other obstructions, a clear exit path must be maintained to an area sufficiently away from the tent.
- Tent stakes must be railed off, capped or covered.
- Unobstructed aisles must be a minimum of 44 inches and shall increase 1 foot for each 50 persons served by such aisle at that point.
- Cooking or heating equipment shall not be located within 10 feet of an exit or combustible materials.
- Curtains used for privacy or that would block wind must comply with the NY State Fire Code section 2410.3.

Fire Protection

One portable fire extinguisher (dry chemical, ABC type) must be furnished at each exit of an enclosed tent. The University sponsor for the event using the tent is responsible for ensuring those fire extinguishers are provided. If necessary, arrangements for portable fire extinguishers may be made by contacting the EH&S's Fire Marshal's Office at (585) 275-3243. There is a charge for any fire protection equipment that is not returned or used improperly.

Operations such as warming foods or cooking demonstrations (including use of sterno and other food warming devices), must be approved in advance by the EH&S's Fire Marshal's Office.

Commercial cooking equipment such as grills and broilers, when used within a tent, must meet the same requirements for indoor commercial kitchens (i.e. proper ventilation, fire suppression systems) and must be a minimum of 20' from the occupied tent. Device(s) must have a dedicated 10 pound multipurpose fire extinguisher within 25 feet.

LP gas containers having a capacity of 500 gallons or less shall be properly secured at least 10 feet away from the tent or any structure with the safety release valves pointed away from the tent.

Flammable liquids shall not be used in the tent.

Cooking: Prior approval must be obtained by the EH&S's Fire Marshal's Office (585) 275-3243. The area must have a minimum 20 BC rated fire extinguisher and if using a deep fryer a "K" rated extinguisher. Fire extinguishers shall show proof of inspection within the last twelve months and contain sodium bicarbonate or potassium bicarbonate.

Appliances: Must be isolated from the public by at least four feet or a suitable barrier placed between the cooking device and the public. Cooking appliances shall be installed per the manufacturer's instructions. U.L listed appliances shall have clearances of not less than 36 inches at the backsides, and 48 inches at the front.

Electrical

The electrical system and equipment must be isolated from the public by proper elevation or guarding. All electrical fuses and switches must be enclosed in approved enclosures. Cables on the ground, in areas traveled by the public must be placed in trenches or protected by approved covers (yellow jackets etc.).

All electrical systems must be properly grounded.

For occupant loads of 300 or less, two separate circuits are required. For occupant loads greater than 300, one of the two circuits must be from an approved emergency system.

Generators must be placed so that exhaust fumes do not enter tents. Generators must be a minimum of 20 feet from the tent and shall be fenced in.

Portable generators shall be U.L. listed or equivalent. Vendors should have the manufacture's written specification for each portable generator and made available to the Fire Marshal.

Such generators shall be capable of running continuously, without refueling for the entire length of the event. Refueling a hot portable generator or the storage of fuel on site is not permitted.

Site

Tents must be placed to provide access to fire hydrants for Fire Department vehicles and provide unobstructed ways of travel at all times to permit prompt escape from any point of danger in case of fire.

To assist in planning, please refer to the Special Event Checklist which is available as a pdf document: [Special Event Checklist](#)