

Haunted Houses & Similar Amusement Uses

2025 California Fire Code Appendix P and CBC §411 - Temporary haunted houses, ghost walks and special amusement areas

Purpose. Haunted houses, ghost walks, maze-type attractions and similar uses can intentionally obscure exits, use low lighting and introduce theatrical effects. These conditions create unique evacuation and fire-protection hazards.

1. Important Appendix P Applicability Note

The 2025 CFC includes Appendix P for temporary haunted houses, ghost walks and similar amusement uses. Appendix P is supplemental and is not automatically mandatory in every jurisdiction unless adopted or otherwise made applicable. The main-body requirements for special amusement areas, fire protection, egress, decorations, electrical hazards and open flames can still apply independently.

Code reference: 2025 CFC Appendix P; 2025 CBC §411; 2025 CFC §914.7

2. Approved Building / Special Amusement Area

Appendix P limits haunted houses and similar amusement uses to structures that comply with the California Building Code provisions for special amusement areas. Special amusement areas are also addressed by CFC §914.7.

Code reference: 2025 CFC Appendix P §P103.1; 2025 CBC §411; CFC §914.7

3. Temporary Tents and Membrane Structures

Under Appendix P, a tent or membrane structure can be used only when all applicable requirements are met, the total tent floor area is less than 1,000 square feet and exit access travel distance from any point is less than 50 feet. Chapter 31 tent requirements also apply.

Code reference: 2025 CFC Appendix P §P103.2; CFC Chapter 31

4. Sprinkler Protection

Buildings containing special amusement areas are generally required to be sprinklered throughout. The CFC provides an exception for a temporary special amusement area less than 1,000 square feet where exit access travel distance from any point to an exit is less than 50 feet. Temporary installations can require an approved temporary sprinkler water supply when sprinklers are required.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §914.7.1; 2025 CBC §411

5. Fire Alarm, Detection and Emergency Notification

- Special amusement areas require the fire detection/alarm features established by CFC §914.7 and CBC §411.
- The attraction must account for theatrical smoke/fog and special effects so required detection is not defeated or repeatedly placed out of service.
- Emergency notification must be capable of overriding normal show effects and communicating evacuation instructions where required.
- Exit signs and emergency lighting must remain effective despite low-light or theatrical conditions.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §914.7; 2025 CBC §411

6. Evacuation Plan and Staffing

- A fire safety and evacuation plan complying with CFC Section 404 must be submitted where Appendix P applies.
- Qualified staff must be sufficient to control occupant load and assist patrons during evacuation.
- Staff must know exit routes, emergency shutdown procedures, alarm activation and how to call the fire department.
- Occupant load must be controlled so the attraction does not exceed the approved capacity.

Code reference: 2025 CFC Appendix P §§P103.3-P103.4; CFC §404

7. Decorations, Scenery and Ignition Sources

- Scenery, drapes, fabrics, foam products and decorative materials must comply with CFC Chapter 8 and applicable State Fire Marshal flame-resistance requirements.
- Required exits, signs, fire extinguishers, alarm devices and sprinkler components may not be concealed by decorations.
- Open flames, candles and flame effects are restricted by CFC Section 308 and can require separate permits/approvals.
- Temporary electrical wiring, extension cords, lighting and special effects equipment must comply with CFC Chapter 6 and the California Electrical Code.

Code reference: 2025 CFC Chapters 6 and 8; CFC §308

8. Pre-Opening Inspection Checklist

- Approved floor plan and occupant load established.
- All required exits, exit signs and emergency lights operational.
- Travel paths are not blocked by scenery or props.
- Required sprinkler/alarm/detection systems operational.
- Theatrical effects do not disable fire-safety systems.
- Decorative materials have required flame-performance documentation.
- Extinguishers installed and accessible.
- Emergency/evacuation plan available and staff trained.
- Required fire watch/crowd management provided.
- Temporary wiring and open-flame activities approved.

Primary References

- 2025 California Fire Code Appendix P - Temporary Haunted Houses, Ghost Walks and Similar Amusement Uses (supplemental unless adopted/referenced)
- 2025 California Fire Code §914.7 - Special Amusement Areas
- 2025 California Building Code §411 - Special Amusement Areas
- 2025 California Fire Code Chapters 6, 8, 9, 10 and 31

This handout is an informational summary. It does not replace the adopted code, approved plans, permit conditions, State licensing requirements, or determinations of the fire code official. Project-specific requirements may vary.