

Fire Watch

2025 California Fire Code §901.7 - Fire protection system impairments and approved fire watch

Purpose. A fire watch is a temporary life-safety measure used when required fire protection is impaired or when the fire code official determines that a hazardous condition requires dedicated observation. A fire watch does not replace timely system repair.

1. When a Fire Watch Can Be Required

When a required fire protection system is out of service, the fire department and fire code official must be notified immediately. Where required by the fire code official, the affected building or area must either be evacuated or protected by an approved fire watch until the required system is restored.

Fire watch can also be required for construction, hot work, special events or other hazardous conditions under separate CFC provisions.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §901.7 and other applicable chapters

2. Primary Duty of Fire Watch Personnel

For a fire-protection-system impairment under CFC §901.7, fire watch personnel are dedicated to constant patrol of the protected premises and watching for fire. They must have at least one approved means to notify the fire department. Other duties that interfere with continuous patrol should not be assigned.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §901.7

3. Fire Watch Personnel

- Must understand the area and hazard being protected.
- Must know the locations of exits, fire extinguishers, alarm reporting methods and any remaining operable fire-protection features.
- Must have a reliable means to immediately contact 911/fire department.
- Must be capable of continuously patrolling the assigned area and recognizing fire, smoke or dangerous conditions.
- Should be briefed on emergency procedures and the limits of their role; fire watch personnel are not a substitute for firefighters.

4. Patrol and Documentation

The fire code official may establish the required patrol pattern, staffing level and documentation for the specific impairment. Do not assume a universal 15-, 30- or 60-minute interval; some fire-watch conditions require constant patrol rather than periodic rounds.

- Record the date and start/end time of the watch.
- Identify each fire watch person and assigned area.
- Record patrol rounds or continuous-post assignments as required.
- Note hazards, corrective actions, alarms, smoke/fire observations and emergency notifications.
- Document the time the impaired system is restored and the fire watch is released.

5. Actions if Smoke or Fire Is Found

- Immediately notify the fire department using the approved means.
- Activate the building fire alarm or emergency notification process when available/appropriate.
- Initiate evacuation in accordance with the approved emergency plan.
- Use a portable extinguisher only if trained, the fire is incipient-stage, a safe exit is maintained and the attempt does not delay notification/evacuation.
- Meet responding firefighters and provide the location and nature of the condition.

6. System Impairment Coordination

- Identify an impairment coordinator when required by the applicable CFC/NFPA impairment procedures.
- Tag or identify impaired equipment as required.
- Notify affected parties, monitoring services and authorities as applicable.

- Minimize the area and duration of impairment.
- Restore the system as soon as possible and complete required testing before returning it to service.
- Notify required parties when protection has been restored.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §§901.7.1-901.7.8; California NFPA 25 for water-based systems

7. Fire Watch Is Not Permission to Operate Indefinitely

A fire watch is an interim risk-control measure. The fire code official can impose additional conditions, restrict occupancy, require evacuation or discontinue an activity when the remaining risk is unacceptable. Repairs to required systems should proceed without unnecessary delay.

Primary References

- 2025 California Fire Code §901.7 - Systems out of service
- California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, fire-protection system inspection/maintenance provisions
- California NFPA 25 - water-based fire protection system impairment procedures, where applicable
- Other CFC fire-watch provisions for construction, hot work, special events or hazardous operations, as applicable

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.