

KEY BOXES (KNOX BOXES)

2025 California Fire Code — Section 506, Key Boxes

Terminology: The California Fire Code uses the generic term “key box.” “Knox Box” is a commonly used proprietary rapid-entry product name. The code requirement is for an approved key box that meets the applicable listing and approval requirements.

When a Key Box May Be Required

CFC §506.1 authorizes the fire code official to require a key box when **secured openings restrict access** to or within a structure or area, or when **immediate access is necessary for lifesaving or firefighting purposes**.

Short code excerpt: *“The key box shall be of an approved type listed in accordance with UL 1037.”*

Minimum Code Requirements

Requirement	What the Code Requires
Authority to require	A key box may be required by the fire code official when access is restricted by secured openings or immediate emergency access is needed.
Location	The key box must be installed in an approved location.
Listing	The key box must be an approved type listed in accordance with UL 1037.
Contents	The box must contain the keys needed to provide necessary access as required by the fire code official.
Gates / barriers	An approved lock must be installed on gates or similar barriers when required by the fire code official.
Changed / rekeyed locks	If a lock is changed or rekeyed, the building operator must immediately notify the fire code official and provide the new key.
Key box maintenance	The key corresponding to the changed or rekeyed lock must be secured in the key box so emergency access remains current.

Nonstandard Fire Service Elevator Keys

CFC §506.1.2 contains additional requirements when a key box is provided for nonstandardized fire service elevator keys. In summary, the box must:

- Be compatible with the jurisdiction's existing rapid-entry key box system and be approved by the fire code official.
- Be permanently identified for fire department elevator-key use.
- Be located at the elevator bank at the lobby nearest the lowest level of fire department access.
- Be mounted 5 feet 6 inches above the finished floor on the right side of the elevator bank.
- Primarily contain fire service elevator keys; additional elevator-access tools or emergency-planning information may be included when authorized.
- Provide additional boxes where elevator banks are separated by more than 30 feet, subject to the exception in §506.1.2.

Elevator-key exception: Section 506.1.2 permits a single box adjacent to a fire command center, or allows the nonstandard elevator key to be secured in another qualifying key box, when the section's exception is satisfied.

What Should Be Kept in the Key Box?

Section 506.1 requires keys necessary to gain the access identified by the fire code official. Depending on the building or site, this may involve keys needed to pass through secured openings or reach areas required for emergency operations. The code does not establish one universal contents list for every building.

Important Code Distinction

A Knox-branded box is not automatically required by the statewide wording of CFC §506. The statewide code requires an approved, UL 1037-listed key box. A jurisdiction may adopt or specify a particular rapid-entry system through its local code, standards, or approval process.

Official References

Primary: 2025 California Fire Code, Title 24, Part 9, §506 — Key Boxes

[ICC Digital Codes — 2025 California Fire Code, Chapter 5](#)

Referenced listing standard: UL 1037 — Standard for Antitheft Alarms and Devices (as referenced by CFC §506.1)

Code note: This handout summarizes the cited code requirements for public use. It does not replace the adopted California Fire Code, approved plans, permits, local amendments, or determinations required by the applicable code.