

Temporarily Occupied Privacy Enclosures

Temporarily occupied privacy enclosures are installed typically to provide privacy during phone calls or remote meetings. This bulletin clarifies the Chief Building Official's position with respect to the design of sprinkler systems and building permit requirements for these structures.

Background

The increasing prevalence of open office floor plans and remote work in recent years has led to greater need for building operators to provide facilities that allow occupants to make or take phone calls, or conduct remote meetings in privacy. A common solution is to include self-contained enclosures that are typically pre-constructed modular units. Due to their small size, and intended brief and occasional occupancy, these enclosures straddle the expectations of what is considered furniture or a room. The purpose of this bulletin is to update and clarify the approach taken by the Chief Building Official with respect to sprinkler design of these enclosures.

Building Permit Required

Installation of a temporarily occupied privacy enclosure requires a building permit and accompanying drawings showing the floor plan, arrangement and manufacturers' drawings and specifications. An electrical permit for alteration of the building fire alarm system, and a sprinkler permit for the alteration of the sprinkler system may also be required.



Figure 1. Common Privacy Enclosure

Sprinkler Protection of Temporarily Occupied Enclosures

Where a self-contained enclosure intended for temporary occupancy is provided, the Chief Building Official may, in a building required to be sprinklered, accept such an enclosure without sprinklers, provided that:

- The floor area in which the temporarily occupied enclosure is located is fully sprinkler protected;
- Adequate clearance is provided above the temporarily occupied enclosure to permit the unobstructed development of the sprinkler spray pattern;
- Each enclosure is limited to an internal area of not more than 2.4 m², where
 - Each enclosure is separated so as to prevent the spread of fire, or
 - Enclosures are connected in groups of not more than four units, where they are predominantly of noncombustible construction; and
- The designer has identified the location and extents of the proposed enclosure(s) on the sprinkler plans submitted for a sprinkler permit.

The requirements of Article 3.2.5.12. of the Building By-law identify that sprinkler design of a building shall conform with NFPA 13 (or its derivative standards – where applicable). However, the currently referenced version NFPA 13 (2013) does not provide specific guidance for temporarily occupied enclosures.

The general principles of sprinkler coverage aim to require protection in all occupied areas. However, exceptions are permitted in certain circumstances where there are physical constraints or other

impracticalities exist, and that the risk to life of property is demonstrably low. Given the small size of the enclosure, life safety concerns from a fire in the enclosure is generally seen to be limited as the occupant can readily determine if there is a fire and egress from the enclosure. Therefore, it is the Chief Building Official's position that the principal concern is the potential for fire growth or spread resulting from a shielded fire in the enclosure.

The 2022 version of NFPA 13, now specifically acknowledges temporarily occupied enclosures and identifies some conditions under where the provisions of sprinkler is not required. Given the wide variety of possible configuration and enclosure construction, it is up to sprinkler designers to assess the specific of the proposed use and design accordingly in coordination with other design professionals.

Fire Spread

The clarifying information in this bulletin make reference to concepts of spatial separation to prevent the spread of fire, and of noncombustible construction. These terms have not been formally defined in the context of temporarily occupied enclosures, since this is joint responsibility of both the architectural designer and the sprinkler designer. However, as a general guidance, physical separation by at least 3 m is strongly recommended, and substantially noncombustible construction should include a majority of metal or fire retardant impregnated structural elements, with only limited amounts of materials that exceed a flamespread of 150.

Other Considerations

Given the intent that temporarily occupied enclosures provide privacy, it should be expected that these enclosures will include some degree of sound proofing or visual treatments (such as tints, blinds, or curtains). Designers should consider the potential impact of any sound proofing or visual occlusion on the ability of occupants of the enclosure to be aware of external conditions that could impact their safety.

Designers and involved professionals must also consider requirements pertaining to fire alarm audibility or visual signalling, as well as egress. If the building is provided with a fire alarm system, then suitable notification appliances are required to be provided in accordance with the provisions of the Building By-law. Egress from the enclosure shall comply with the requirements of Article 2.7.1.2. of the Fire By-law, providing adequate access to an aisle leading to access to egress in two directions, as follows:

2.7.1.2. Open Floor Areas

- 1) Aisles in conformance with Sentences (2) to (4) shall be provided in every *floor area* that
 - a) is not subdivided into rooms or *suites* served by corridors giving *access to exits*, and
 - b) is required by the Building By-law to have more than one egress doorway.
- 2) Every required egress doorway shall be served by an aisle that
 - a) has a clear width not less than 1 100 mm,
 - b) has access to at least one additional egress doorway, and
 - c) at every point on the aisle, provides a choice of 2 opposite directions by which to reach an egress doorway.
- 3) A subsidiary aisle with only a single direction of travel to an aisle described in Sentence (2) is permitted provided it has a clear width not less than 900 mm and a length not greater than
 - a) 7.5 m in *business and personal services, mercantile and high-hazard industrial occupancies*,
 - b) 10 m in *medium-hazard industrial occupancies*, or
 - c) 15 m in *low-hazard industrial occupancies*.
- 4) Every individual work area in *business and personal services occupancies* shall be located adjacent to an aisle or subsidiary aisle.

It should also be noted that Vancouver is in an area of recognized seismic risk. As with any other non-structural element in a building, the enclosure is required to be seismically restrained in accordance with the Building By-law, which could be accomplished by means such as bolting the assembly to the floor.

Designers and trades are expected to obtain the appropriate building permits and coordinate their work in order to ensure that an appropriate level of safety and property protection is achieved.

(Original signed by)

Saul Schwebs, Architect AIBC
Chief Building Official
Director, Building Code and Policy

(Original signed by)

Kevin Lau, P.Eng., C.P.
Manager, Building Policy Branch

(Original signed by)

Rick Cheung, P.Eng., C.P.
Assistant Fire Chief
Vancouver Fire Rescue Services