



# DESIGN TIMES

## 2005 Harris County Fire Code

A newly adopted Harris County Fire Code came into effect January 1, 2005. The new Harris County Fire Code applies to the unincorporated parts of Harris County, Texas. Compliance with the code is required for new construction, for renovation/reconstruction projects where the cost of the renovation (*total value of labor + materials*) is greater than or equal to 50% of the value of the structure prior to the improvement, or where an existing building changes occupancy classification. The code does not apply within the incorporated areas of the county, such as the City of Houston, Bellaire, etc.

The Harris County Fire Code is an amended version of the 2003 International Fire Code. For system requirements and to supplement areas where the new Harris County Fire Code is vague or incomplete, the 2003 International Fire Code shall be referenced; Harris County Fire Code provisions shall take precedence where the two differ.

The new Harris County Fire Code permitting process shall be handled by the Public Infrastructure Department, Engineering Division of Harris County. The county currently has a 2-day permitting procedure but has no 'express' or 'walk-through' permitting services. Construction shall not begin in unincorporated areas prior to obtaining a county fire permit.

### In order to obtain a permit, the following items must be submitted to the County Engineer:

- Application for Permit
- A completed Fire Code Design and Compliance Review Sheet printed on a reproducible medium, such as vellum or mylar, and signed and sealed by a Texas licensed Engineer or Architect.
- A scaled site plan and floor plan of each building level being permitted, including the following:
  - Types of construction materials and classes of interior finishes.
  - Locations of all exits, including distances between exits, exit widths, types of exits, and any special requirements.
  - Locations of all fire alarm equipment, automatic sprinklers, emergency lighting, etc. required to meet this code.



*Note: If the building is to be sprinkled, the fire entry detail consisting of the vault, entry assembly, etc. may be included on the Engineer's construction documents with a note that detailed sprinkler drawings will be submitted at a later date. A permit can be issued providing all other requirements are met.*

### **Permitting Process:**

- Harris County Fire Code review typically takes two (2) business days (excluding the Civil portion). Unlike the City of Houston, there are no 'express' or 'walk-through' permitting services.
- If the County Building Official determines that the proposed construction meets the code requirements, then a permit will be issued.
- If the proposed construction is rejected, the application package will be returned with an explanation of why it does not meet requirements.

*Note: The Engineer or Architect may request a hearing to discuss the comments; however, plans will have to be corrected and re-submitted as a new set of originals.*

- After all requirements are met and all permitting fees have been paid, the permit shall be issued as an addendum to the Development Permit.

*Note: **Construction must be started within 180 days of issuance of the permit or the permit will be void.***

- After construction, the **permittee shall ensure** that their Engineer, Architect, or International Code Council Certified Building Official (ICC-CBO) has made sufficient inspections so that they can complete an as-built certificate or Request for Final Inspection form.
- When the structure is ready for occupancy, an as-built certificate or a Request for Final Inspection form must be completed, signed and sealed by a Texas licensed Engineer or Architect, or an ICC-CBO. A completed Form 009 shall also be included if the building has an automatic fire protection system.

*Note: **A licensed fire sprinkler contractor shall issue Form 009.***

- After all requirements have been met, the County Building Official will conduct a final inspection. Upon approval, the County Building Official will issue a Certificate of Compliance and a release of final utilities to the appropriate utility company.

### **If a permit is denied, a variance can be granted for the following reasons:**

- The applicant has shown good and sufficient cause.
- It has been determined that failure to grant the variance would result in an exceptional hardship to the applicant.

*Note: Economic hardship shall not constitute the sole basis for granting a variance.*

- The granting of a variance will not result in an increased risk of fire, additional threats to public safety, extraordinary public expense or create nuisances, cause fraud or victimization of the public.

- Variances shall only be issued upon a determination that a variance is the minimum necessary, considering the fire hazard, to afford relief.

**Provisions to 'grandfather' buildings are as follows:**

- Any construction where a permit was applied for or obtained prior to January 1, 2005.
- Any civil site plans showing fire access roads submitted for review or approved prior to January 1, 2005 are grandfathered for fire access roads.

**Fees for permits and inspections are as follows and are not transferable or refundable:**

- Permit for a public building or commercial establishment - **\$500.00**
- First re-inspection - **\$0.00**
- Subsequent re-inspection(s) - **\$100.00**
- Certificate of Compliance - **\$100.00**

**Any related questions can be addressed via e-mail to [codeword@eng.hctx.net](mailto:codeword@eng.hctx.net) or to the following people:**



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**Any questions for the Fire Marshall's office can be addressed to the following people:**

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