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Fire Safety Retrofitting Guidelines For Historic Buildings

CSI Division:
Division 1 - General Requirements
Section:
Reference Standards
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Disclaimer

Technical Procedures Disclaimer
Prior to inclusion in GSA's library of procedures, documents are reviewed by one or more qualified preservation specialists for general consistency with the Secretary of Interior Standards for rehabilitating historic buildings as understood at the time the procedure is added to the library. All specifications require project-specific editing and professional judgement regarding the applicability of a procedure to a particular building, project or location. References to products and suppliers are to serve as a general guideline and do not constitute a federal endorsement or determination that a product or method is the best or most current alternative, remains available, or is compliant with current environmental regulations and safety standards. The library of procedures is intended to serve as a resource, not a substitute, for specification development by a qualified preservation professional.

Rewrite
We've reviewed these procedures for general consistency with federal standards for rehabilitating historic buildings and provide them only as a reference. Specifications should only be applied under the guidance of a qualified preservation professional who can assess the applicability of a procedure to a particular building, project or location. References to products and suppliers serve as general guidelines and do not constitute a federal endorsement nor a determination that a product or method is the best alternative or compliant with current environmental regulations and safety standards.

This procedure includes guidance on planning appropriate fire safety treatments in historic buildings. General applications for fire safety retrofitting are outlined below along with treatments that are recommended and not recommended for those applications. This material has been extracted from the GSA Fire Safety Retrofitting publication issued jointly by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the General Services Administration. Refer to this publication for detailed information on the importance of fire safety retrofitting, the assessment process and implementation in historic buildings.

Corridors

Recommended	Not Recommended

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Maintaining the historically significant building fabric within exit corridors without sacrificing fire safety requirements.	• Permanently altering the appearance of the historically significant ceiling, floor, or wall materials in a corridor to accommodate an exit access corridor.
	• Removing historically significant openings and doors to accommodate an exit access corridor.
	• Adding new doors or openings that would permanently alter the appearance of the historically significant building fabric to accommodate an exit access corridor or permanently closing off significant openings.

Interior Stairs

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Maintaining the exiting stairway's significant historic characteristics and satisfying fundamental exiting requirements.	• Totally enclosing an historically significant open stair without considering alternate means of satisfying fundamental exiting requirements
• Constructing the new stairs from approved materials and methods, and in a style that provides a distinct differentiation between old and new.	• Permanently altering the appearance of historically significant fabric to accommodate a new stair.

Exterior Stairs

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Placing new stairs to satisfy exiting requirements so that the stairs do not detract from historically significant facades or the setting of the building and are not readily seen by the public.	• Locating new stairs on facades that are historically significant or visible to the public.

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Constructing new exiting stairs, if required to augment existing requirements, so that the alteration of the existing plan of the historic building fabric is minimized.	• Matching new stair construction with existing historic construction.
• Minimizing the physical alteration to the existing historic facade at the points where the new stair contacts the building.	• Altering an existing historic facade to accommodate a new stair.

Doors

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Maintaining historically significant doors where a fire- rated door is required as a component to the means of egress.	• Altering or removing a historic door without considering viable alternatives to meet fire safety requirements.
• Constructing new fire-rated door is required as a component to the means of egress.	
• Attaching the historic door to an approved fire-rated door assembly without permanent damage tot he historic door, where replacement of the historic door might otherwise be required to conform to a means of egress.	

Materials

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Installation of passive fire suppression materials so that the significant historic fabric of a building is not permanently altered.	• Permanently altering the appearance of historic walls, ceilings, and floor construction or the removal of significant existing historic building fabric to accommodate passive fire suppression.

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Installation of fire proofing materials as required to augment existing nonconforming historic construction so that the significant historic fabric of a building is not permanently altered.	• Installation of new partitions that damage historic features or historic character of the spaces.
• The evaluation of equivalency concepts for existing construction so that the least amount of alteration to the fabric takes place.	• Addition of modern materials over existing historic building fabric

Fire Sprinklers

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Evaluation of each historically significant space within a building for the selection of the best-suited fire sprinkler system type.	• Routing sprinkler pipe so that it is exposed to view within the historically significant building fabric.
• Piping routes, sprinkler head types, styles, colors, and locations implemented so that the historic fabric and visual integrity of the building are least affected.	• Putting sidewall mounted sprinklers into plaster cornices and reliefs.
	• Furring down ceilings in significant interior spaces to conceal piping.

Fire Extinguishers

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Installing fire extinguishers without the permanent alteration of the appearance of the historically significant building fabric	• Installing fire extinguishers and/or cabinets on existing historically significant walls in a manner that permanently alters their character and appearance.
• Using surface mounted fire extinguisher cabinets in areas where recessed cabinets would alter the	

Recommended	Not Recommended
significant historic fabric, such as marble wainscoting.	
• Using recess mounted fire extinguisher cabinets where possible.	
• Selection of a fire cabinet style that is least obtrusive to the surrounding historic fabric.	

Smoke Detectors

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Retrofitting smoke and heat detectors and required electrical conduits so that they are not unusually prominent or do not affect the significant historic fabric of a building.	• Installing smoke and heat detectors in historic plaster relief or cornices.
	• Installing smoke and heat detectors on the surface of ceiling that are historically significant.

Fire Alarms

Recommended	Not Recommended
• Locating fire alarms where routing of conduit will not permanently alter the historic fabric of the building.	• Installing fire alarm pull stations in such a manner that they detract from or permanently change the appearance of the historic building or area.
• Selecting the style of alarm systems so that their appearance is in harmony with other architectural elements of the historic building.	

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