



Robert L. Quinn
Commissioner

State of New Hampshire

DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY

Division of Fire Safety

Office of the State Fire Marshal

Office: 110 Smokey Bear Boulevard, Concord, NH 03301

Mailing Address: 33 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03305

Telephone: 603-223-4289 • **Fax:** 603-223-4294

www.nh.gov/firesafety



Paul J. Parisi
State Fire Marshal

BULLETIN #	TITLE			INITIAL RELEASE
2020-12	Tent Installation and Operation Guidance for School Administrative Units			September 1, 2020
REVISION #	RELEASED BY	APPROVED BY	SOURCE	REVISION DATE
	SPT	PJP	NH RSA's 153, 155 and 155-A	

Purpose:

The purpose of this bulletin is to provide guidance to school administrative units on the installation and operation of tents on their property for educational and instructional purposes. The installation and operation of tents is governed by the currently adopted State Fire Code (NH RSA 153) and the State Building Code (NH RSA 155-A).

Background:

Due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, many school administrative units (SAUs) are opting to erect tent structures on their campus at the urging of the NH Department of Education in order to expand outdoor classroom space with the goal of improving air quality and to help meet social distancing requirements when the weather permits. These tents are considered structures and therefore require permits of both the local building official (if they exceed 400 square feet) and by the local fire official (if considered to be a place of assembly). This includes all tent structures, with or without sides.

Requirements:

1. Tents or similar structures with a coverage area greater than 400 square feet are required to be permitted by the local building official.
2. A tent that has an occupant load greater than 50 persons requires a Place of Assembly permit from the local Fire Department. Occupant loads are determined by how the space will be used. As it pertains to an educational setting, the occupant load is calculated at 1 person per 20 square feet. Therefore a tent of 1,000 square feet would have an occupant load of 50, and would require a Place of Assembly permit. Some local jurisdictions may also require an extension of the existing POA permit depending on the proximity of the tent to the building. Tents that are permitted as place of assembly require an emergency evacuation plan.
3. The tent fabric needs to be either made of or be treated with a qualifying fire resistant material and proof of this needs to be provided.
4. The occupant load of the tent must be posted at the main entrance to the tent. The exits, other than open sides of tent, shall be marked as required by code and a clear exit path must be maintained. Egress lighting must be installed if the tent will be used after daylight hours. Portable fire extinguishers are required to be located in the tent in a location where there can be easily accessed. No hay, straw, or other combustible material is permitted inside or within the immediate exterior perimeter of the tent.

5. Tents located adjacent to a building shall not obstruct egress or sprinkler systems under canopies.
6. Electrical equipment shall be inspected daily by a person from the SAU with an understanding of electrical systems. Please contact the local building inspector for guidance on any electrical components within the tent. Some may require a local electrical permit. Generators are required to be located outside at least 5 feet from the tent.
7. Any circumstance where an open flame is involved needs to have the Authority Having Jurisdictions approval. Heating devices must be manufactured and listed (UL or ASTME) for usage under a tent, and clearances to combustible materials must be adhered to. If fossil fuel heating devices are used (natural gas, propane, wood, diesel, kerosene, gasoline, etc.), carbon monoxide detection is required within the tent.
8. Cooking is not permitted under a tent.
9. Tent construction should only be completed by persons with previous experience. Special attention shall be paid to the tent manufacturer's instructions relative to:
 - Staking: Pattern, type of stake, angle, length and depth
 - Strapping: Type of material, lengths, distance from each other
 - Wind load: This varies from tent to tent depending on type of construction (pole, frame, etc.) and the manufacturers specifications. Tent manufacturer documents must be consulted for this specific information. SAUs should refer to the provided tent company manufactures information during installation in reference to when tents should be evacuated due to weather conditions. This information should be posted in the tent, should also be included in the emergency action plans of the SAU, and should be well-known by the faculty of the school and the staff that will be operating inside the tent structure.
10. The following is for a tent inspection checklist, it will be used by the inspector during the permit inspection process:
<https://www.nh.gov/safety/divisions/firesafety/documents/TentInspectionChecklist.pdf>

If you have any questions regarding the installation of tents for educational purposes, please contact the State Fire Marshal's Office at (603) 223-4289.