



Technical Bulletin #18-005  
May 2018 / 2017 OFC

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## Special Amusement Buildings / Haunts / Haunted Houses

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Referenced Codes and Standards: OAC § 1301:7-7-01(B)(3)(c); OFC § 102.3.3  
OAC § 1301:7-7-2(B); OFC § 202  
OAC § 1301:7-7-09(N)(7); OFC § 914.7  
OAC § 1301:7-7-10(H)(2); OFC § 1008.2  
OAC § 1301:7-7-10(H)(3); OFC § 1008.3  
OAC § 1301:7-7-10(V); OFC § 1022

During Halloween season, people are often inspired to open and operate a “haunt” or “haunted house” in an old school building, a fairgrounds building, or even an old, vacant house. The State Fire Marshal is often asked whether the Ohio Fire Code (OFC) prohibits the creation of a haunt or haunted house within one of these existing structures. The quick answer is no. The OFC does not prohibit the creation of a haunt, haunted house or a special amusement building within an already existing structure. However, OFC section 102.3.3 states that the use or occupancy of a building cannot be changed unless the structure is brought into compliance with the current applicable OFC and Ohio Building Code (OBC) requirements for the intended new use.

In some instances, the fire code official can approve less than full compliance with current requirements if the new use will be less hazardous than the previous use. However, because the nature of a haunt or haunted house is to confuse, disorient, and distract its occupants in an enclosed, dimly lit, space, most haunts or haunted houses are more hazardous than the previously approved use of the space. Therefore, any haunt or haunted house type of attraction created in any structure not originally designed and approved for such use must generally be brought into compliance with all applicable current OFC provisions for the new use group prior to opening to the public.<sup>1</sup>

Haunted houses typically fall into the use group of “special amusement buildings.” Accordingly, the requirements for the special amusement use-group classification must be met. OFC section 202 defines “special amusement building” as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, provisions of the OBC would likely also be implicated and would need to be complied with during the construction of a new building, the alteration of an existing structure, or the change of use of a structure for use as a haunted house. To determine if provisions of the OBC are applicable to a haunted house related project or require certain processes or building modifications, please consult your legal counsel, the building code official having jurisdiction, or the Ohio Board of Building Standards.

**“Special amusement building.”** A building that is temporary, permanent or mobile that contains a device or system that conveys passengers or provides a walkway along, around or over a course in any direction as a form of amusement arranged so that the egress path is not readily apparent due to visual or audio distractions or an intentionally confounded egress path, or is not readily available because of the mode of conveyance through the building or structure.

Requirements for ‘special amusement buildings’ set forth basic life safety systems (or approved alternatives) that must be installed and properly working at all times when the public is present. These may include the installation of a sprinkler system, fire-alarm system, special exit markings, and/or smoke detection. Because individuals often want to locate a haunt or haunted house in a building that does not have all of these safety features, installation of or upgrades to these important life safety systems are often required prior to opening to the public.

In addition to the provisions of OFC section 102.3.3, operators and fire code officials should review the provisions of OFC section 914.7 to determine whether sprinkler systems and smoke detection systems are required. Rule 10 should be reviewed to insure proper egress component requirements are met. Specifically, means of egress illumination must be provided in accordance with OFC sections 1008.2 and 1008.3 and sufficient and proper exiting capabilities must be provided in accordance with OFC section 1022.

Although other OFC provisions may apply, a review of these specific provisions will serve as a good starting point to ensure that all mandatory minimum safety features are provided. This will enable the public, and staff, to participate in a fun and safe haunted house experience. Having minimum safety measures in place at such facilities is especially important in the haunt or haunted house environment because, again, the purpose of such is to confuse, disorient and distract. Therefore, minimum safety measures are important in case an emergency of any kind occurs.

The Ohio Department of Commerce, Division of State Fire Marshal’s (SFM) Code Enforcement Bureau (CEB) can offer assistance regarding code requirements and applicability and can provide code enforcement assistance if needed. The SFM-CEB can be contacted via mail, facsimile, phone, or on-line as follows:

State Fire Marshal - Code Enforcement Bureau  
8895 E. Main Street  
Reynoldsburg, OH 43068  
(614) 728-5460 / (888) 276-0303  
Fax: (614) 728-5168  
Email [sfm\\_codeenf@com.state.oh.us](mailto:sfm_codeenf@com.state.oh.us)  
[www.com.ohio.gov/fire](http://www.com.ohio.gov/fire)

For assistance with the application of the Ohio Building Code, contact your local building code official or the Ohio Bureau of Building Standards at 614-644-2613.

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The 2017 Ohio Fire Code (OFC) became effective December 15, 2017. This document is a brief discussion of basic considerations and is intended only as an informational tool to provide general guidance and direction regarding fire safety requirements and applicable fire code requirements that must be complied with when constructing, adapting or modifying a structure for use as a special amusement building. For detailed information and guidance and to ensure that all applicable requirements are complied with, please contact your legal counsel and local building and fire code officials.

## 1301:7-7-01 Administration

### Sec. 102.3 Minimum conditions of occupancy.

**102.3.1.** All structures subject to this code may be occupied only in accordance with the provisions of the building code as listed in rule 1301:7-7-80 of the Administrative Code and, at a minimum, the following paragraphs:

(i) **New construction.** Occupancy of a newly constructed structure must be in compliance with paragraph (E)(3)(c)(105.3.3) and paragraph (I)(1)(109.1) of this rule and paragraph (A)(5)(901.5) of rule 1301:7-7-09 of the Administrative Code.

(ii) **Existing structures.**

(a) **Alterations.** Any alterations to an existing structure shall be done in accordance with paragraph (B)(4)(102.4) of this rule.

(b) **Change of occupancy.** Any changes of occupancy to an existing structure shall be done in accordance with paragraph (B)(3)(c)(102.3.3) of this rule.

(c) **General occupancy.** A new or existing structure or premises may only be occupied in accordance with paragraph (E)(3)(c)(105.3.3) and paragraph (I)(1)(109.1) of this rule. No existing structure or premises or part thereof that constitutes a distinct or serious hazard to life or property or is not legally in existence at the time of adoption of this code shall be occupied.

(iii) Occupancy of any structure, premise, vehicle or location that constitutes a distinct or serious hazard to life or property is hereby declared a public nuisance.

**102.3.2 Certificate of occupancy.** A responsible person shall maintain a copy of the current

certificate of occupancy, for a structure regulated by the building code in accordance with 1301:7-7-80 of the Administrative Code and make it available to the fire code official upon request. This paragraph only applies to a certificate of occupancy in existence as of the effective date of this rule issued by a building official and/or a certificate of occupancy issued by a building official after the effective date of this rule.

**102.3.3 Change of use or occupancy.** Changes shall not be made in the use or occupancy of any structure that would place the structure in a different division of the same group or occupancy or in a different group of occupancies, unless such structure is made to comply with the requirements of this code and the building code as listed in rule 1301:7-7-80 of the Administrative Code. Subject to the approval of the fire code official, the use or occupancy of an existing structure shall be allowed to be changed and the structure is allowed to be occupied for purposes in other groups without conforming to all the requirements of this code and the building code as listed in rule 1301:7-7-80 of the Administrative Code for those groups, provided the new or proposed use is less hazardous, based on life and fire risk, than the existing use.

**102.3.4 Limited building code occupancy approvals.** Except as described in this paragraph, partial occupancy approvals issued under section 111.1.1.3 of the building code as listed in rule 1301:7-7-80 of the Administrative Code, time limited occupancy approvals issued under section 111.1.1.4 of the building code as listed in rule 1301:7-7-80 of the Administrative Code, temporary occupancy approvals issued under sections 102.8 and 111.1.1.5 of the building code as listed in rule 1301:7-7-80 of the Administrative Code and variances to the building code as listed in rule 1301:7-7-80 of the Administrative Code issued by the state board of building appeals pursuant to section 3781.19 of the Revised Code shall be considered, to the extent of the approval or deviation from the building code issued by such officials, as

conditions compliant with the construction and design provisions of this code. All maintenance and operational provisions of this code shall apply to such occupancies.

**Exception:** Any structure, location or condition that constitutes a distinct or serious hazard under this code. For such structure, location or condition, the fire code official may issue an order requiring compliance with any parts of this code or impose other conditions that such official determines are necessary to make such places safe for occupancy and use. If the local fire code official was provided an opportunity for input at a hearing conducted by the state board of building appeals pursuant to section 3781.19 of the Revised Code and a variance to the building code for matters that impact fire safety was granted at such a hearing for a place subject to this exception, an order issued by a local fire code official under this exception shall be valid only if it is first authorized in writing by the state fire marshal.

## 1301:7-7-02 Definitions

### Sec. 202 General definitions.

**“Special amusement building.”** A building that is temporary, permanent or mobile that contains a device or system that conveys passengers or provides a walkway along, around or over a course in any direction as a form of amusement arranged so that the egress path is not readily apparent due to visual or audio distractions or an intentionally confounded egress path, or is not readily available because of the mode of conveyance through the building or structure.

## 1301:7-7-09 Fire Protection Systems

### Sec. 914 Fire protection based on special detailed requirements of use and occupancy.

**914.7 Special amusement buildings.** Special amusement buildings shall comply with

paragraphs (N)(7)(a)(914.7.1) and (N)(7)(b)(914.7.2) of this rule.

**914.7.1 Automatic sprinkler system.** Special amusement buildings shall be equipped throughout with an automatic sprinkler system in accordance with paragraph (C)(3)(a)(i)(903.3.1.1) of this rule. Where the special amusement building is temporary, movable, or portable the sprinkler water supply shall be of an approved temporary means.

#### Exceptions:

1. Automatic sprinklers are not required where the total floor area of a temporary special amusement occupancy is less than 1,000 square feet (93 m<sup>2</sup>) and the exit access travel distance from any point to an exit is less than 50 feet (15 240 mm).

2. Automatic fire sprinklers are not required where the total floor area of a temporary special amusement occupancy in an existing building is less than 5,000 square feet (93 m<sup>2</sup>), the travel distance from any point to an exit is less than 50 feet (15,240 mm), and where, in the opinion of the fire code official, additional means have been provided to ensure an equivalent level of safety for all occupants during the hours that the special amusement building is operated and occupied. Such additional means may include, but not be limited to: fire watches, reduced occupant loads, additional means of egress, additional detection and portable fire extinguishers.

**914.7.2 Automatic smoke detection.** Special amusement buildings shall be equipped with an automatic smoke detection system in accordance with paragraph (G)(2)(1)(907.2.12) of this rule.

## 1301:7-7-10 Means of Egress

### Sec. 1008 Means of Egress illumination

**1008.1 Means of egress illumination.** Illumination shall be provided in the means of egress in accordance with *paragraph (BB)(2)(1008.2) of this rule*. Under emergency power, means of egress illumination shall comply with *paragraph (H)(3)(1008.3) of this rule*.

**1008.2 Illumination required.** The means of egress serving a room or space shall be illuminated at all times that the room or space is occupied.

**Exceptions:**

1. Occupancies in Group U.
2. Aisle accessways in Group A.
3. Dwelling units and sleeping units in Groups R-1, R-2 and R-3.
4. Sleeping units of Group I occupancies.

**1008.2.1 Illumination level under normal power.**

The means of egress illumination level shall not be less than 1 footcandle (11 lux) at the walking surface.

**Exception:** For auditoriums, theaters, concert or opera halls and similar assembly occupancies, the illumination at the walking surface is permitted to be reduced during performances by one of the following methods provided that the required illumination is automatically restored upon activation of a premises' fire alarm system:

1. Externally illuminated walking surfaces shall be permitted to be illuminated to not less than 0.2 footcandle (2.15 lux).
2. Steps, landings and the sides of ramps shall be permitted to be marked with self-luminous materials in accordance with *paragraphs (Y)(2)(a)(1025.2.1), (Y)(2)(b)(1025.2.2) and (Y)(2)(d)(1025.2.4) of this rule* by systems listed in accordance with UL 1994 as listed in *rule 1301:7-7-80 of the Administrative Code*.

**1008.2.2 Exit discharge.** In Group I-2 occupancies where two or more exits are required, on the exterior landings required by *paragraph (J)(6)(a)(1010.6.1) of this rule*, means of egress illumination levels for the exit discharge shall be provided such that failure of any single lighting unit shall not reduce the

illumination level at the landing to less than 1 footcandle (11 lux).

**1008.3 Emergency power for illumination.** The power supply for means of egress illumination shall normally be provided by the premises' electrical supply.

**1008.3.1 General.** In the event of power supply failure in rooms and spaces that require two or more means of egress an emergency electrical system shall automatically illuminate all of the following areas:

- (i) Aisles.
- (ii) Corridors.
- (iii) Exit access stairways and ramps.

**1008.3.2 Buildings.** In the event of power supply failure, in buildings that require two or more means of egress, an emergency electrical system shall automatically illuminate all of the following areas:

- (i) Interior exit access stairways and ramps.
- (ii) Interior and exterior exit stairways and ramps.
- (iii) Exit passageways.
- (iv) Vestibules and areas on the level of discharge used for exit discharge in accordance with *paragraph (BB)(1)(1028.1) of this rule*.
- (v) Exterior landings as required by *paragraph (J)(1)(f)(1010.1.6) of this rule* for exit doorways that lead directly to the exit discharge.

**1008.3.3 Rooms and spaces.** In the event of power supply failure, an emergency electrical system shall automatically illuminate all of the following areas:

- (i) Electrical equipment rooms.
- (ii) Fire command centers.
- (iii) Fire pump rooms.
- (iv) Generator rooms.

(v) Public restrooms with an area greater than 300 square feet (27.87 m<sup>2</sup>).

**1008.3.4 Duration.** The emergency power system shall provide power for a duration of not less than 90 minutes and shall consist of storage batteries, unit equipment or an on-site generator. The installation of the emergency power system shall be in accordance with *paragraph (D)(604) of rule 1301:7-7-06 of the Administrative Code.*

**1008.3.5 Illumination level under emergency power.** Emergency lighting facilities shall be arranged to provide initial illumination that is not less than an average of 1 footcandle (11 lux) and a minimum at any point of 0.1 footcandle (1 lux) measured along the path of egress at floor level. Illumination levels shall be permitted to decline to 0.6 footcandle (6 lux) average and a minimum at any point of 0.06 footcandle (0.6 lux) at the end of the emergency lighting time duration. A maximum-to-minimum illumination uniformity ratio of 40 to 1 shall not be exceeded. In Group I-2 occupancies, failure of any single lighting unit shall not reduce the illumination level to less than 0.2 footcandle (2.2 lux).

## Sec. 1022 Exits

**1022.1 General.** Exits shall comply with *paragraphs (V)(1022) to (AA)(1027) of this rule* and the applicable requirements of *paragraphs (C)(1003) to (O)(1015) of this rule.* An exit shall not be used for any purpose that interferes with its function as a means of egress. Once a given level of exit protection is achieved, such level of protection shall not be reduced until arrival at the exit discharge. Exits shall be continuous from the point of entry into the exit to the exit discharge.

**1022.2 Exterior exit doors.** Buildings or structures used for human occupancy shall have not less than one exterior door that meets the requirements of *paragraph (J)(1)(a)(1010.1.1) of this rule.*

**1022.2.1 Detailed requirements.** Exterior exit doors shall comply with the applicable requirements of *paragraph (J)(1)(1010.1) of this rule.*

**1022.2.2 Arrangement.** Exterior exit doors shall lead directly to the exit discharge or the public way.