

Date: March 19, 2020

To: Whom this Concerns

From: Michael Desrochers, Executive Director, Division of Fire Safety

Subject: COVID-19 Pandemic Operational Adjustments

In an effort to protect the most vulnerable, the Division of Fire Safety has implemented a number of temporary changes to our operation to reduce and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Our district offices and the fire academy remain open with very limited staffing because we are encouraging teleworking. Please recognize our operation may need to be adjusted as the environment changes. The following operational adjustments have been made to date and may change rapidly upon guidance we receive.

Meetings:

We have cancelled all face to face meetings and will resort to conference calls. This applies to all boards, councils, job interviews, pre-construction meetings and inter department work group meetings. The following board meetings will be conducted by conference call - Elevator Safety, Handicap Access, Electrical Licensing, Plumbing Examination Board and the Fire Service Training Council.

Inspections

- **Protecting our most vulnerable** is a priority, therefore, we have ceased conducting inspections of all healthcare facilities including; hospitals, nursing homes, residential board & care and senior elderly housing occupancies. Specific approval must be obtained in advance of any health care related inspection by the Director or Deputy Director.
- **Rough inspections** (electrical, plumbing and construction) may be completed via electronic means, pictures, video or waived by the inspector. I am encouraging to the extent possible we waive all rough inspections by accepting photographs.
- **Purchase and Sale Inspections** are temporarily on hold. If our office has a current inspection (within 3 -years) on file, we can provide a copy of the report for purchase and sale purposes.
- **Final Occupancy Inspections** may be waived with receipt of photographs and or video. Should a final inspection be warranted, all safety and health guidelines shall be adhered to including social distancing. I am encouraging to the extent possible all final occupancy inspections be waived.
- **Plan review and permitting** is being completed remotely by staff and we expect no delays in issuance of permits. I have instructed our staff to focus on plan review and permitting. Although offices are currently open, we are encouraging applicants to mail plans and applications to prevent face to face contact. We are working on providing each district office with a secured drop box for convenience.
- The Division understands **annual third-party inspections** (sprinkler systems, fire alarm systems, hood and suppression systems, boiler inspections and emergency generators) may not be inspected due to access issues therefore, no penalty or enforcement action will be taken for at least the next 90 days.
- We recognize our licensed electricians, plumbers, elevator inspectors, elevator mechanics and our many other certified trade professionals are experiencing some difficulty obtaining

continuing education classes. For this reason, we are seeking authority to waive licensing, certification and registration renewals for 90 days and waiving any late fee for renewal. We expect this authority to be granted soon. We continue to issue renewals for those who have a completed application and we can continue to issue new licenses, certifications and registrations. This waiver is aimed at those who are struggling to complete the continuing education hours.

- There are a number of continuing education courses that can be taken online. To view the listing of online courses visit our website: <https://data.vermont.gov/dataset/DFS-Licensing-Education-Master-Approved-List/6vmn-8uhb>
- The fire academy has cancelled Fire Fighter 1/11 classes and is working vigorously to continue the classroom portions through on-line instruction.
- Our USAR Team, Fire Investigation Unit and Hazardous Material Response Team stand ready to respond.

You will notice our 4 district offices (Springfield, Rutland, Williston and Barre/Berlin) and the Fire Academy located in Pittsford are operating with minimal staffing. We are discouraging face to face contact and practicing social distancing in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We are heavily engaged in teleworking and everyone is checking phone messages and emails daily and I expect all calls will be returned in a timely manner. We are asking for everyone to please respect our best practices as we continue to serve everyone with the outstanding service, you're accustomed to receiving.

For additional information regarding the current status of COVID-19 and for information to assist our first responder community, I urge you to visit our home page click here: <https://firesafety.vermont.gov/>

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