

# NFPA® 301

## Code for Safety to Life from Fire on Merchant Vessels

### 2023 Edition



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## NFPA® 301

### Code for

## Safety to Life from Fire on Merchant Vessels

### 2023 Edition

This edition of NFPA 301, *Code for Safety to Life from Fire on Merchant Vessels*, was prepared by the Technical Committee on Merchant Vessels. It was issued by the Standards Council on March 20, 2022, with an effective date of April 9, 2022, and supersedes all previous editions.

This edition of NFPA 301 was approved as an American National Standard on April 9, 2022.

### Origin and Development of NFPA 301

In 1993, the Coast Guard approached the NFPA Standards Council with a request to form a new committee that would develop a consensus standard on fire protection of merchant vessels, similar in format to the *Life Safety Code*®. The basis for this request was a Coast Guard initiative known as Maritime Regulatory Reform. One aspect of maritime regulatory reform involves greater use of industry standards in lieu of detailed design requirements contained in the Code of Federal Regulations.

The initial approach advocated by the Coast Guard was to develop a standard that was applicable to passenger vessels only and to add requirements for different vessel types in future editions. However, the committee agreed that it would not take much more effort to draft a standard that was applicable to passenger vessels, cargo vessels, and tank vessels. Towing vessels were added to this list in anticipation of a federal law mandating fire protection upgrades. Other vessel types might be added in future editions.

By shifting development and maintenance of regulations to standards-making organizations, the regulators (in this case, the Coast Guard) are assured of dynamic standards that are regularly updated. The marine industry benefits through increased input into the rules it would subsequently be required to follow. Similar efforts either have been completed or are in progress to add marine-specific criteria to existing fire protection system standards, such as automatic sprinklers, water mist extinguishing systems, foam, carbon dioxide, and clean agent alternatives to halons.

NFPA 301 provides minimum requirements for the design, operation, and maintenance of merchant vessels for safety to life from fire and similar emergencies. The document establishes occupancy classifications and then provides requirements for design and construction, access and egress, and fire protection. The document applies to passenger vessels, towing vessels, and cargo vessels.

The code underwent a complete revision in 2001 to implement *Manual of Style for NFPA Technical Committee Documents* changes, which reorganized the document and stressed the use of enforceable language. This revision incorporated changes to the testing requirements for interior finishes, deck coverings, mattresses and bedding, and electrical cable. The code expanded the vessels covered to include ocean-going towing vessels as part of the cargo vessel requirements. In the passenger vessel chapter, the code redefined the classification criteria for vessel categories. One outcome of this change was an attempt to modify the requirements for sprinkler protection on certain classes of passenger vessels so that the requirements more closely matched existing Coast Guard requirements, in order to encourage use of the code as an alternative to Coast Guard prescriptive regulations.

The code underwent another substantial change in the 2008 edition. A new chapter was added to allow vessel designers and other users to incorporate equivalencies and alternative design considerations in vessel construction that satisfy the fundamentals of fire prevention, fire protection, and means of egress. The chapter on towing vessels was completely revised to update requirements for all new-construction towing vessels regardless of length and horsepower, in accordance with current U.S. Coast Guard regulations and industry best practices.



During the revision cycle for the 2013 edition the committee recognized the code as an essential consensus standard on fire protection of merchant vessels per the U.S. Coast Guard's original request in 1993. The NFPA standards-making process and the code can address a new fire hazard or fire protection issue more urgently than can be done by the government's regulatory rulemaking process.

In the 2013 edition of the code, the Technical Committee on Merchant Vessels revised several definitions and updated the publications referenced within the document. The committee also changed the applicability requirements for automatic sprinkler systems and water mist systems to be limited to passenger vessels with overnight accommodations for more than 36 passengers (in addition to Group I and Group II passenger vessels). This change made mandatory automatic fire protection requirements for certain small passenger vessels equivalent to existing federal regulations.

In the 2018 edition of the code, the Technical Committee on Merchant Vessels updated the references in Chapter 2 and Annex D. Chapter 3, Definitions, was also reviewed by the committee and several changes were incorporated. The term *fire endurance* was removed from the code because it is an obsolete term that had been replaced throughout most of the NFPA system with *fire resistance*. Other revised definitions included *furnishings*, *fire protection rating*, *fire resistance rating*, and *fire-rated glazing*.

The committee revised the requirements for backup lighting to reduce the total blackout time in spaces aboard a vessel that do not normally have any natural lighting (e.g., portholes, windows, and so on) to reduce the risk of panic and injury to passengers and crew.

In addition, it was determined that the signage used on doors, passageways, ladders, or stairways that are neither an exit nor a way of exit access needed to be approved by the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ).

The technical committee also incorporated by reference the requirements from NFPA 90A, *Standard for the Installation of Air-Conditioning and Ventilating Systems*, to specify that insulation and coverings for pipes and ducts installed in areas where there is the potential for hot temperatures needed to be assessed to ensure they perform properly when exposed to high temperatures.

For fire test requirements for draperies or other vertically hung textiles, users of the code were directed to NFPA 701, *Standard Methods of Fire Tests for Flame Propagation of Textiles and Films*, or Part 7 of the *IMO Fire Test Procedures Code*.

Finally, the 2018 edition required that portable fire extinguishers be classed in accordance with NFPA 10, *Standard for Portable Fire Extinguishers*, or follow the requirements for portable extinguishers in Title 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

During development of the 2023 edition of the code, the Technical Committee on Merchant Vessels determined that it might be necessary for the authority having jurisdiction to retroactively apply certain requirements within the code as specified. One such example in this edition is the requirement that Group IV (small) passenger vessels with overnight accommodation, regardless of when they were constructed, have interconnected smoke detectors in all accommodation spaces that alarm throughout all accommodation spaces of the vessel. This new requirement is to be applied retroactively as recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) following its investigation of a fire on a small passenger vessel in 2019 that claimed the lives of 34 persons. To ensure operational integrity, the fire detection and alarm systems on vessels are required to be maintained and tested in accordance with *NFPA 72* in its entirety rather than specific chapters in that standard.

In its investigation of the 2019 small passenger vessel fatal fire, the NTSB found that one of two exits from the passenger sleeping quarters was accessible only by climbing into one of the top aftermost inboard bunks. The NTSB determined the effectiveness of this escape hatch as a means of exit was diminished by the location of bunks immediately beneath it. The technical committee revised the requirement for the location of exits, which are now required to be unobstructed and accessible at all times.

The 2023 edition of the code incorporates the requirements in IMO Assembly Resolution A.1116 (30), *Escape Route Signs and Equipment Location Markings*. NFPA 301 also now permits the use of symbols in addition to or in lieu of words on exit signage.

Other changes to NFPA 301 include hybrid fire extinguishing systems. Where used, hybrid fire extinguishing systems are required to be listed, designed, and installed in accordance with NFPA 770.

Finally, the technical committee revised the requirements pertaining to fiber-reinforced plastic (FRP) to eliminate the possibility of confusion when this material is used for construction of the hull or other vessel components.



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**Committee Scope:** This Committee shall have primary responsibility for documents on the protection of human life, property, and the marine environment from fires aboard merchant vessels.



## Contents

<b>Chapter 1 Administration</b> .....	301- 6	<b>Chapter 9 Vessel Services and Fire Detection and Protection Equipment</b> .....	301- 38
1.1 Scope. ....	301- 6	9.1 Fire Detection, Alarm, and Communications Systems. ....	301- 38
1.2 Purpose. ....	301- 6	9.2 Fire Protection Systems and Equipment. ....	301- 38
1.3 Application. ....	301- 6	9.3 Firefighter Protective Clothing, SCBA Equipment, and Fire Control Plans. ....	301- 39
1.4 Equivalency Concepts. ....	301- 7	9.4 Ventilation. ....	301- 40
1.5 Units. ....	301- 7	9.5 Elevators, Escalators, Dumbwaiters, and Other Transfer Devices. ....	301- 42
1.6 Vessel Construction, Repair, and Alteration. ....	301- 7	9.6 General Requirements for Electrical Equipment. ....	301- 42
1.7 Maintenance. ....	301- 7	9.7 Fixed Electric Heating Equipment for Pipelines, Vessels, De-icing, and Snow Melting. ....	301- 42
1.8 Enforcement. ....	301- 7	<b>Chapter 10 Accommodation Spaces</b> .....	301- 42
<b>Chapter 2 Referenced Publications</b> .....	301- 7	10.1 General Requirements. ....	301- 42
2.1 General. ....	301- 7	10.2 Means of Egress Requirements. ....	301- 43
2.2 NFPA Publications. ....	301- 7	10.3 Protection. ....	301- 43
2.3 Other Publications. ....	301- 8	<b>Chapter 11 Medical, Health Care, and Child Care Spaces</b> .....	301- 44
2.4 References for Extracts in Mandatory Sections. ....	301- 9	11.1 General Requirements. ....	301- 44
<b>Chapter 3 Definitions</b> .....	301- 9	11.2 Means of Egress Requirements. ....	301- 44
3.1 General. ....	301- 9	11.3 Protection. ....	301- 45
3.2 NFPA Official Definitions. ....	301- 9	11.4 Vessel Services. ....	301- 46
3.3 General Definitions. ....	301- 10	<b>Chapter 12 Service Spaces</b> .....	301- 46
3.4 Space Definitions. ....	301- 12	12.1 General Requirements. ....	301- 46
3.5 Special Definitions for Terms Used in Chapter 5. ....	301- 12	12.2 Means of Egress Requirements. ....	301- 46
<b>Chapter 4 Fundamental Requirements</b> .....	301- 12	12.3 Protection. ....	301- 47
4.1 Fundamentals. ....	301- 12	<b>Chapter 13 Electrical and Control Spaces</b> .....	301- 47
4.2 Fundamentals of Means of Egress. ....	301- 12	13.1 General Requirements. ....	301- 47
4.3 Fundamentals of Construction. ....	301- 13	13.2 Means of Egress Requirements. ....	301- 47
4.4 Fundamentals of Illumination. ....	301- 13	13.3 Protection. ....	301- 47
4.5 Fundamentals of Alarms. ....	301- 13	<b>Chapter 14 Engineering and Machinery Spaces</b> .....	301- 47
4.6 Life Safety Compliance Options. ....	301- 13	14.1 General Requirements. ....	301- 47
<b>Chapter 5 Performance-Based Option</b> .....	301- 13	14.2 Means of Egress Requirements. ....	301- 48
5.1 General Requirements. ....	301- 13	14.3 Protection. ....	301- 48
5.2 Performance Criteria. ....	301- 14	14.4 Vessel Services. ....	301- 49
5.3 Retained Prescriptive Requirements. ....	301- 14	14.5 Compartmentation. ....	301- 49
5.4 Design Specifications and Other Conditions. ....	301- 14	14.6 Pressurized Oil Systems. ....	301- 49
5.5 Design Fire Scenarios. ....	301- 15	14.7 Ventilation Systems. ....	301- 50
5.6 Evaluation of Proposed Designs. ....	301- 16	14.8 Hot Surfaces. ....	301- 50
5.7 Safety Factors. ....	301- 16	14.9 Bilges. ....	301- 50
5.8 Documentation Requirements. ....	301- 16	14.10 Incinerator Spaces. ....	301- 50
<b>Chapter 6 Classification of Occupancy and Hazard of Contents</b> .....	301- 17	14.11 Portable Extinguishers. ....	301- 50
6.1 Classification of Occupancy. ....	301- 17	<b>Chapter 15 Storage Spaces</b> .....	301- 50
<b>Chapter 7 Means of Egress</b> .....	301- 18	15.1 General Requirements. ....	301- 50
7.1 General. ....	301- 18	15.2 Means of Egress Requirements. ....	301- 50
7.2 Means of Egress Components. ....	301- 19	15.3 Protection. ....	301- 51
7.3 Capacity of Means of Egress. ....	301- 27	15.4 Special Provisions for High-Risk Fuels Storage. ....	301- 51
7.4 Number of Separate Means of Egress. ....	301- 27	<b>Chapter 16 Cargo Spaces and Fuel Tanks</b> .....	301- 51
7.5 Arrangement of Means of Egress. ....	301- 27	16.1 General Requirements. ....	301- 51
7.6 Measurement of Travel Distance to Exits. ....	301- 28	16.2 Means of Egress Requirements. ....	301- 51
7.7 Discharge from Exits. ....	301- 28	16.3 Protection. ....	301- 51
7.8 Illumination of Means of Egress. ....	301- 29	16.4 Refrigerated Cargo Holds. ....	301- 51
7.9 Emergency Lighting. ....	301- 29	<b>Chapter 17 Open Decks</b> .....	301- 51
7.10 Marking of Means of Egress. ....	301- 30	17.1 General Requirements. ....	301- 51
7.11 Low-Location Lighting. ....	301- 30	17.2 Means of Egress Requirements. ....	301- 52
<b>Chapter 8 Features of Fire Protection</b> .....	301- 31	17.3 Special Considerations for Open Decks Intended for Storage of Ship's Stores. ....	301- 52
8.1 General. ....	301- 31		
8.2 Construction and Compartmentation. ....	301- 31		
8.3 Interior Finish. ....	301- 34		
8.4 Furnishings. ....	301- 35		
8.5 Fire Safety Requirements of Electrical and Fiber Optic Wires and Cables. ....	301- 36		



<b>Chapter 18 Helicopter Decks</b> .....	<b>301– 52</b>	20.11 Open Decks. ....	<b>301– 56</b>
18.1 General Requirements. ....	<b>301– 52</b>	20.12 Helicopter Decks. ....	<b>301– 56</b>
18.2 Means of Egress Requirements. ....	<b>301– 52</b>	20.13 Vessel Services. ....	<b>301– 56</b>
18.3 Protection. ....	<b>301– 52</b>		
<b>Chapter 19 Towing Vessels</b> .....	<b>301– 53</b>	<b>Chapter 21 Passenger Vessels</b> .....	<b>301– 57</b>
19.1 General Requirements. ....	<b>301– 53</b>	21.1 General Requirements. ....	<b>301– 57</b>
19.2 Means of Egress. ....	<b>301– 53</b>	21.2 Means of Egress. ....	<b>301– 57</b>
19.3 Protection. (Reserved) .....	<b>301– 53</b>	21.3 Protection. ....	<b>301– 59</b>
19.4 Accommodation Spaces. ....	<b>301– 53</b>	21.4 Accommodation Spaces. ....	<b>301– 60</b>
19.5 Medical, Health Care, and Child Care Spaces. ..	<b>301– 53</b>	21.5 Medical, Health Care, and Child Care Spaces. ..	<b>301– 60</b>
19.6 Service Spaces. ....	<b>301– 53</b>	21.6 Service Spaces. ....	<b>301– 60</b>
19.7 Electrical and Control Spaces. ....	<b>301– 53</b>	21.7 Electrical and Control Spaces. ....	<b>301– 60</b>
19.8 Engineering and Machinery Spaces. ....	<b>301– 53</b>	21.8 Engineering and Machinery Spaces. ....	<b>301– 60</b>
19.9 Storage Spaces. ....	<b>301– 53</b>	21.9 Storage Spaces. ....	<b>301– 60</b>
19.10 Fuel Tanks. ....	<b>301– 53</b>	21.10 Cargo Spaces and Fuel Tanks. ....	<b>301– 60</b>
19.11 Open Decks. ....	<b>301– 54</b>	21.11 Open Decks. ....	<b>301– 61</b>
19.12 Helicopter Decks. ....	<b>301– 54</b>	21.12 Helicopter Decks. ....	<b>301– 61</b>
19.13 Vessel Services. ....	<b>301– 54</b>	21.13 Vessel Services. ....	<b>301– 61</b>
		21.14 Group V Passenger Vessels. ....	<b>301– 62</b>
<b>Chapter 20 Cargo and Tank Vessels</b> .....	<b>301– 54</b>	21.15 Group IV Passenger Vessels. ....	<b>301– 62</b>
20.1 General Requirements. ....	<b>301– 54</b>		
20.2 Means of Egress. ....	<b>301– 54</b>	<b>Chapter 22 Reserved</b> .....	<b>301– 63</b>
20.3 Protection. ....	<b>301– 55</b>		
20.4 Accommodation Spaces. ....	<b>301– 55</b>	<b>Annex A Explanatory Material</b> .....	<b>301– 63</b>
20.5 Medical Spaces. ....	<b>301– 56</b>		
20.6 Service Spaces. ....	<b>301– 56</b>	<b>Annex B Ventilation Guidelines</b> .....	<b>301– 83</b>
20.7 Electrical and Control Spaces. ....	<b>301– 56</b>		
20.8 Engineering and Machinery Spaces. ....	<b>301– 56</b>	<b>Annex C Sample Ordinance Adopting NFPA 301 ....</b>	<b>301– 84</b>
20.9 Storage Spaces. ....	<b>301– 56</b>		
20.10 Cargo Spaces and Fuel Tanks. ....	<b>301– 56</b>	<b>Annex D Informational References</b> .....	<b>301– 85</b>
		<b>Index</b> .....	<b>301– 88</b>



## NFPA 301

## Code for

## Safety to Life from Fire on Merchant Vessels

2023 Edition

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Information on referenced and extracted publications can be found in Chapter 2 and Annex D.

## Chapter 1 Administration

## 1.1 Scope.

**1.1.1 Title.** NFPA 301 shall be known as the *Merchant Vessel Code* and is referred to herein as “this code” or “the code.”

**1.1.2** The code addresses construction, arrangement, protection, and space utilization factors that are necessary to minimize danger to life from fire, smoke, fumes, or panic. It also provides for reasonable protection against property damage and avoidance of environmental damage consistent with the normal operation of vessels. Fundamental requirements applicable to all vessels are found in Chapters 1 through 9. These fundamental requirements are modified in Chapters 10 through 18 as applicable for any type of space. The requirements in Chapters 1 through 18 are modified in Chapters 19 through 21 as applicable for any given vessel type. For example, a passenger vessel would follow the requirements of Chapters 1 through 18 and Chapter 21.

**1.1.3** The code identifies the minimum criteria for the design of egress facilities so as to permit prompt escape of passengers

and crew to safe areas aboard vessels and, where necessary, to survival craft embarkation stations.

**1.1.4** The code recognizes that life safety is more than a matter of egress and, accordingly, deals with other considerations that are essential to life safety. It also recognizes the unique operating environment of merchant vessels and the relationships among life safety, property protection, and environmental protection and deals with these criteria accordingly.

**1.1.5\*** Where permanently moored and occupied as buildings, merchant vessels shall be permitted to be treated as buildings and shall be permitted to be subject to the provisions of appropriate building codes and standards as specified by the local authority having jurisdiction (AHJ).

## 1.2 Purpose.

**1.2.1** The purpose of this code is to provide minimum requirements, with due regard to function, for the design, operation, and maintenance of merchant vessels for safety to life from fire and similar emergencies.

**1.2.2** As related to fire safety, the objective of this code is to protect the passengers and crew from loss of life. It is also intended that the code will provide for minimum loss of property and minimum impact on the environment.

**1.2.3\*** The level of safety is achieved by the combination of design, prevention, protection, egress, and other features enumerated in the individual vessel occupancy classification with due regard to the capabilities and reliability of the features involved. Recognition is given to human factors and to the need for crew training and passenger instruction.

**1.2.4** The code endeavors to avoid requirements that could involve unreasonable hardships or unnecessary inconvenience or interference with the normal use of a vessel, but it provides minimum requirements for fire safety consistent with the public interest.

## 1.3 Application.

**1.3.1\*** This code shall apply to new construction merchant vessels to the extent described in Chapters 19 through 21. This code does not apply to pleasure craft or commercial craft covered by NFPA 302 or to warships.

**1.3.2** Existing vessels undergoing major modification or conversion shall comply with all requirements of this code within the areas being modified and ancillary support systems.

**1.3.3** Any alteration or any installation of new equipment, joinery, or furnishings shall comply with the requirements for new construction.

**1.3.4** Where specific requirements contained in Chapters 10 through 18 differ from general requirements contained in Chapters 1 through 9, the requirements of Chapters 10 through 18 shall govern. Where the requirements in Chapters 19 through 21 differ from the requirements in Chapters 1 through 18, the requirements in Chapters 19 through 21 shall govern.

**1.3.5 Provisions in Excess of Code Requirements.** Nothing in this code shall be construed to prohibit additional means of egress, or otherwise safer means of egress than those specified by the minimum requirements of this code.



**1.3.6\*** This code is not intended for application in addition to *International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)* requirements to vessels in international trade.

**N 1.3.7 Retroactivity.** The provisions of this code shall be retroactive for existing vessels where specifically identified.

#### 1.4 Equivalency Concepts.

**1.4.1** Nothing in this code is intended to prevent the use of systems, methods, or devices of equivalent or superior quality, strength, fire resistance, durability, and safety as alternatives to those prescribed in this code.

**1.4.2** The specific requirements of this code shall be permitted to be modified by the AHJ to allow alternative arrangements that will ensure, as much as practicable, an equivalent level of safety to life from fire, but in no case shall the modification afford less safety to life than that which, in the judgment of the AHJ, would be provided by compliance with the corresponding provisions contained in this code.

**1.4.3** Vessels with alternative fire protection features accepted by the AHJ shall be considered as conforming with the code.

#### 1.5 Units.

**1.5.1** Metric units of measurement in this standard are in accordance with the modernized metric system known as the International System of Units (SI).

**1.5.2** If a value for measurement as provided in this code is followed by an equivalent value in other units, the first stated value is to be regarded as the requirement. A given equivalent value might be an approximation.

#### 1.6 Vessel Construction, Repair, and Alteration.

**1.6.1\*** Vessels built or converted to meet this code shall comply with all of the provisions of the code.

**1.6.2 Changes in Service.** In any vessel, whether necessitating a physical alteration or not, a change in service from one use to another shall be permitted only if such vessel, or portion thereof, conforms with the requirements of this code that apply to new construction for the proposed new use.

**1.6.3\*** Vessels or portions of vessels shall be permitted to be occupied during conversion, repair, alterations, or additions only if all means of egress and all fire protection features are in place and continuously maintained for the occupied portion. Temporarily installed fire protection features shall comply with Section 1.4 of this code.

#### 1.7 Maintenance.

**1.7.1** Whenever or wherever any device, equipment, system, condition, arrangement, level of protection, or any other feature is required for compliance with the provisions of this code, such device, equipment, system, condition, arrangement, level of protection, or other feature shall thereafter be permanently maintained unless the code exempts such maintenance.

**1.7.2** Additional approved life safety features such as, but not limited to, automatic sprinklers, fire alarm systems, standpipes, and horizontal exits, if not required by the code, shall be permanently maintained or removed.

**1.8 Enforcement.** This code shall be administered and enforced by the authority having jurisdiction designated by the

governing authority. (See Annex C for sample wording for enabling legislation.)

## Chapter 2 Referenced Publications

**2.1 General.** The documents or portions thereof listed in this chapter are referenced within this code and shall be considered part of the requirements of this document.

**2.2 NFPA Publications.** National Fire Protection Association, 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169-7471.

NFPA 10, *Standard for Portable Fire Extinguishers*, 2022 edition.

NFPA 11, *Standard for Low-, Medium-, and High-Expansion Foam*, 2021 edition.

NFPA 13, *Standard for the Installation of Sprinkler Systems*, 2022 edition.

NFPA 17, *Standard for Dry Chemical Extinguishing Systems*, 2021 edition.

NFPA 17A, *Standard for Wet Chemical Extinguishing Systems*, 2021 edition.

NFPA 22, *Standard for Water Tanks for Private Fire Protection*, 2018 edition.

NFPA 25, *Standard for the Inspection, Testing, and Maintenance of Water-Based Fire Protection Systems*, 2020 edition.

NFPA 30, *Flammable and Combustible Liquids Code*, 2018 edition.

NFPA 30B, *Code for the Manufacture and Storage of Aerosol Products*, 2021 edition.

NFPA 70®, *National Electrical Code®*, 2023 edition.

NFPA 72®, *National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code®*, 2022 edition.

NFPA 80, *Standard for Fire Doors and Other Opening Protectives*, 2022 edition.

NFPA 90A, *Standard for the Installation of Air-Conditioning and Ventilating Systems*, 2021 edition.

NFPA 96, *Standard for Ventilation Control and Fire Protection of Commercial Cooking Operations*, 2021 edition.

NFPA 99, *Health Care Facilities Code*, 2021 edition.

NFPA 101®, *Life Safety Code®*, 2021 edition.

NFPA 253, *Standard Method of Test for Critical Radiant Flux of Floor Covering Systems Using a Radiant Heat Energy Source*, 2019 edition.

NFPA 262, *Standard Method of Test for Flame Travel and Smoke of Wires and Cables for Use in Air-Handling Spaces*, 2019 edition.

NFPA 270, *Standard Test Method for Measurement of Smoke Obscuration Using a Conical Radiant Source in a Single Closed Chamber*, 2018 edition.

NFPA 286, *Standard Methods of Fire Tests for Evaluating Contribution of Wall and Ceiling Interior Finish to Room Fire Growth*, 2019 edition.

NFPA 302, *Fire Protection Standard for Pleasure and Commercial Motor Craft*, 2020 edition.

NFPA 701, *Standard Methods of Fire Tests for Flame Propagation of Textiles and Films*, 2019 edition.

NFPA 750, *Standard on Water Mist Fire Protection Systems*, 2023 edition.

NFPA 770 *Standard on Hybrid (Water and Inert Gas) Fire-Extinguishing Systems*, 2021 edition.

NFPA 1964, *Standard for Spray Nozzles and Appliances*, 2018 edition.