

NFPA[®]

909

**Code for the Protection of
Cultural Resource Properties —
Museums, Libraries, and
Places of Worship**

2017



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NFPA® 909

Code for the

Protection of Cultural Resource Properties — Museums, Libraries, and Places of Worship

2017 Edition

This edition of NFPA 909, *Code for the Protection of Cultural Resource Properties — Museums, Libraries, and Places of Worship*, was prepared by the Technical Committee on Cultural Resources. It was issued by the Standards Council on November 11, 2016, with an effective date of December 1, 2016, and supersedes all previous editions.

This document has been amended by one or more Tentative Interim Amendments (TIAs) and/or Errata. See “Codes & Standards” at www.nfpa.org for more information.

This edition of NFPA 909 was approved as an American National Standard on December 1, 2016.

Origin and Development of NFPA 909

Since the first NFPA document was issued on this subject in 1948 (*Protecting Our Heritage*), the Technical Committee on Cultural Resources has developed a series of recommended practices to govern these specialized buildings and sites. Five separate documents governing libraries, museums, places of worship, historic structures, and historic sites existed in 1996.

In each case, the documents were written as recommended practices or guides. There were a number of reasons why the documents were developed and maintained as such. One reason had to do with the delicate nature of the facilities and sites. Unlike commercial buildings, “new” historic structures are not constructed. In other words, all the historic structures are existing, making retrofit of many common fire protection systems impractical to install in some cases. In addition, retrofit of fire alarm systems or sprinkler systems can be cost prohibitive for a smaller, historically significant structure. Unfortunately, many of the readily available solutions to correct fire protection problems in other types of existing facilities might not be practical in the case of older, historic buildings.

A number of philosophical issues centered on the methods used to protect cultural resource facilities. One main item dealt with a structured fire prevention program that is carried out by the facility operator. The span of these protection schemes must account for structures ranging from single-family dwellings to public libraries to public museums.

In 1997, work on a comprehensive project to merge the five separate documents was completed. A new standard, NFPA 909, *Standard for the Protection of Cultural Resources, Including Museums, Libraries, Places of Worship, and Historic Properties*, consolidated the fire protection requirements for libraries, museums, and places of worship into one document. This milestone recognized that many traditional fire protection solutions do not work unless significant resources are applied to a given problem or situation. This same philosophy was carried over to the 2001 edition of NFPA 909. A continued focus of the 2001 edition was the need to have a structured fire prevention program that would be carried out by the facility operator.

The status of the 2001 edition was upgraded to a code, rather than a standard, in recognition of the wide range of requirements that exist in NFPA 909. Specifically, sections of NFPA 909 stipulate when and where certain requirements are mandatory. In addition to those changes, the chapter on historic structures and buildings was completely revised. That chapter defers to NFPA 914, *Code for Fire Protection of Historic Structures*.

The 2005 edition of NFPA 909 underwent a major reorganization in accordance with the *Manual of Style for NFPA Technical Committee Documents*. Technical changes included the deletion of a previous annex on fire risk assessment in heritage premises in favor of reference to more current approaches to the subject. Other changes included the type of automatic sprinklers to be used in cultural

resource properties and the activation of fire dampers. In addition, emergency action checklists and inspection forms were added for places of worship.

The 2010 edition of NFPA 909 was a complete revision that reflected the addition of security to the committee's scope. Technical changes included the addition of "hazards other than fire" to the goals and objectives; required a vulnerability assessment; added new chapters on planning for protection, emergency operations, and security; and included a new annex describing commonly used premises protection systems and equipment.

Building on the myriad changes made for the 2010 edition, the committee added new provisions to the 2013 edition and clarified many requirements. The application and use of certain materials such as noncombustible and limited-combustible materials were revised to note how they are to be used rather than simply defining them. A number of changes were accepted that centered on the operational features of the facility — a critical component in these occupancies. The changes included determining the loss thresholds that a property can tolerate, maintaining a line of communication with the authority having jurisdiction, and clarifying the list of elements that the vulnerability assessment needs to consider. An expanded set of requirements was added to assist the governing body in executing supplemental inspections of automatic sprinkler systems with regard to concerns over interior corrosion.

Updates for the 2017 edition include expanded provisions for outdoor collections and archaeological sites and their protection against wildfire; further clarification of sprinkler system corrosion protection criteria; mandated integrated system testing per NFPA 4, *Standard for Integrated Fire Protection and Life Safety System Testing*; and the addition of numerous events to Annex B, Fire Experience in Cultural Properties.

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Committee Scope: This Committee shall have primary responsibility for documents on fire safety and security for libraries, museums, places of worship, and historic structures and their contents, but shall not overlap the provisions of NFPA 101, *Life Safety Code*, and NFPA 731, *Standard for the Installation of Electronic Premises Security Systems*.

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NFPA 909

Code for the

Protection of Cultural Resource Properties —
Museums, Libraries, and Places of Worship

2017 Edition

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

Chapter 1 Administration

1.1 Scope.

1.1.1 This code describes principles and practices of protection for cultural resource properties (including, but not limited to, museums, libraries, and places of worship), their contents, and collections, against conditions or physical situations with the potential to cause damage or loss.

1.1.2 This code covers ongoing operations and rehabilitation and acknowledges the need to preserve culturally significant and character-defining building features and sensitive, often irreplaceable, collections and to provide continuity of operations.

1.1.3* Principles and practices for life safety in cultural resource properties are outside the scope of this code. Where

this code includes provisions for maintaining means of egress and controlling occupant load, it is to facilitate the evacuation of items of cultural significance, allow access for damage limitation teams in an emergency, and prevent damage to collections through overcrowding or as an unintended consequence of an emergency evacuation.

1.1.4 Library and museum collections that are privately owned and not open to the public shall not be required to meet the requirements of this code.

1.2* Purpose. The purpose of this code shall be to prescribe a comprehensive program, consistent with the mission of the organization, that protects cultural resource properties and their contents and collections from conditions or physical situations having the potential to cause damage or loss.

1.3* Application. This code shall apply to culturally significant structures, spaces within other buildings used for culturally significant purposes, and their contents.

1.3.1 New Cultural Resource Property Occupancies. The requirements of this code shall apply to the following:

- (1) New buildings or portions thereof occupied as a cultural resource property
- (2) Additions made to a cultural resource property
- (3) Existing buildings or portions thereof upon change of occupancy to a cultural resource property

1.3.2 Existing Cultural Resource Property Occupancies.

1.3.2.1 An existing building in which a cultural resource property occupancy is housed that was established prior to the effective date of this code shall be permitted to be approved for continued use if it conforms to or is made to conform to provisions of this code to the extent that, in the opinion of the authority having jurisdiction, reasonable protection is provided and maintained.

1.3.2.2 The requirements of this code shall apply when any of the following occur:

- (1)* Changes in the construction classification, occupancy of a space, or the way a space is used
- (2) Alterations, renovations, or modifications that affect the performance of existing fire protection features and systems, including fixed fire protection, detection and suppression, compartmentation, electronic premises security systems, and physical security devices
- (3) Changes that add new sources of ignition or change the nature of the fire load
- (4)* Modifications to operations that increase the vulnerability to deliberate acts by third parties, staff, or visitors; natural disasters; or other reasonably foreseeable hazards
- (5) Changes in the contents that affect the performance of existing fire protection features and systems, including fixed fire protection, detection and suppression, compartmentation, electronic premises security systems, physical security devices, or features intended to mitigate the effects of other conditions or physical situations with the potential to cause damage or loss

1.3.2.3 Libraries, museums, and places of worship housed in historic structures shall also comply with the requirements of NFPA 914.