



*The Commonwealth of  
Massachusetts  
Department of Public Safety*



## **BUILDING PERMIT REQUIREMENTS FOR TEMPORARY TENTS**

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May 24, 2012

The following Article is found in the May 2012 Issue of CODEWORD under the title "TENT SAFETY" but is issued in whole, below, to all Building Departments, emphasizing building permit requirements for tents utilized on a temporary basis (erected for < 180 days in total).



Note that the "120 sq. ft. commercial building rule" for building permitting is replaced with different building permit triggering criteria when dealing with temporary tents. These building permit triggering criteria commence when the temporary tent is > 400 sq. ft. OR where the aggregate area of the temporary tent or tents > 700 sq. ft. and where the temporary tent or tents is/are open on all sides and if more than one open tent, there is a minimum clearance of twelve (12) feet to all structures and other open tents (see MA-amended **IBC-09, Section 3102.1** and **IFC-09, Section 2403** (note that other Code Sections, related to tent fabric performance, egress, etc., also apply).

### **CODEWORD ARTICLE LEADLINE**

The New England area has enjoyed relatively nice weather during the past winter and early spring months.

However, history has demonstrated that weather patterns change almost instantaneously in this region. With graduation and wedding season rapidly approaching, many people will erect tents to help shield guests from potentially hostile weather events. This article is intended to remind building officials of the need for permits for certain types of tents, but also to advise that there have been changes made relating to permitting requirements with the adoption of the Eighth Edition of the Building Code.

In explanation, **Section 3103.1 of the 2009 International Building Code (IBC)** establishes criterion for temporary structures, directing the reader to the International Fire Code (IFC) for specific requirements pertaining to the use of temporary tents.

The IFC defines a TENT as a structure, enclosure or shelter, with or without sidewalls or drops, constructed of fabric or pliable material supported by any manner except by air or the contents that it protects.

**IFC Section 2403.2** establishes that tents and membrane structures having an area in excess of 400 square feet (37 m<sup>2</sup>) shall not be erected, operated or maintained for any purpose without first obtaining a permit and approval (emphasis added). The section continues to allow certain exceptions to this requirement as follows.

Exceptions:

1. Tents used exclusively for recreational camping purposes.
2. Tents open on all sides which comply with all of the following:
  - 2.1. Individual tents having a maximum size of 700 square feet (65 m<sup>2</sup>).
  - 2.2. The aggregate area of multiple tents placed side by side without a fire break clearance of 12 feet (3658 mm), not exceeding 700 square feet (65 m<sup>2</sup>) total.
  - 2.3. A minimum clearance of 12 feet (3658 mm) to all structures and other tents.

Previous editions of the code required permits and approvals for most tent structures measuring 120 square feet or greater and did not afford many exceptions. Current code requirements are a bit more permissive. The reason, in part, for less restrictive requirements in this version of the code is in recognition of the difficulties that are associated with gaining approvals for tent structures on short notice.

Although permit requirements are somewhat less restrictive in this code version, the Department of Public Safety cautions all tent users to take tent safety seriously; making sure that guests and patrons have adequate access to, form and within the tent by means of appropriately

sized, clear aisle ways and that the use of incendiary products are limited in accordance with local fire prevention restrictions.

Thank you for taking the time to review this information.

**Sincerely,**

**Tom Riley**  
Department of Public Safety

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