



# KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE



AUGUST 1, 2022

## Follow-up on Advancing Building Emergency Preparation

**The Facilities Management Division (FMD) has improved building occupant safety by developing a revised building emergency safety strategic plan and hiring an emergency management coordinator (Coordinator).** The emergency safety plan addresses gaps found in our audit related to evacuation procedures and technical faults with emergency alarm and public address systems. The Coordinator participates as an evaluator for fire drills to identify any problems and follows up with the appropriate party to ensure any issues are addressed. FMD also provided guidance, resources, and regular communication with agencies on individualized emergency plans for staff who may require assistance. And FMD addressed a significant safety risk by conducting work to replace door locks in the Yesler Building that were found to be out of compliance with fire code.

**More work is needed to enhance the safety of county building occupants.** FMD has not yet analyzed whether barriers to egress exist in county buildings, nor has it ensured that both wayfinding maps in county buildings and the new door locks in the Yesler Building are in compliance with fire code. Additionally, the active shooter emergency plan and guidance for non-evacuation emergencies are not yet complete. Finally, FMD will need to develop a communication strategy to inform all county employees about functions and roles in its updated emergency safety strategy.

Of the eight audit recommendations:

	4 DONE		2 PROGRESS		2 OPEN
<b>Fully implemented</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.		<b>Partially implemented</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.		<b>Remain unresolved</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.	

Please see details below for implementation status of each recommendation.

## Recommendation 1

PROGRESS



**The Facilities Management Division should update its strategy and processes for ensuring the safety of building occupants during emergencies. This strategy should reflect changes in building use such as increased remote work and the likelihood that floor wardens may not be present during emergencies. Full implementation would include developing, documenting, communicating, training, and implementing the updated strategy, including specifying roles and responsibilities for people involved.**

STATUS UPDATE: FMD drafted a new "Floor Warden Strategic Plan" to address gaps outlined in our 2020 audit and created a Coordinator position responsible for implementing the program. The new strategic approach retains planning and communications functions with organization leads and primary floor wardens from the previous plan, which also includes long-term scheduling of routine fire drills. FMD adapted the strategic plan to the new hybrid work environment by developing a distributed training approach. FMD states its goal is that 75-percent employee participation will ensure most staff working on-site have the tools and training needed to act as floor wardens in the event of an emergency. The Coordinator has begun training and implementing the strategy by conducting a pre-drill dialogue with agencies and participating as an observer in most fire drills across county-owned facilities.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, FMD should establish a communication strategy that informs all county employees of the contents and expectations of the new floor warden program to ensure it meets its goal of 75-percent employee participation. FMD has only been presenting the new program to agencies during fire drills, which means many agencies that have not yet participated in a drill may not know about the new processes. Additionally, FMD designated a backup Coordinator, but that person still needs to be trained on roles and responsibilities to ensure that the updated safety program will function in the Coordinator's absence.

## Recommendation 2

DONE



**The Facilities Management Division should develop, document, train, and implement a systematic process to ensure that building emergency safety issues identified in emergency drills, tests, and other information sources are communicated to responsible parties and resolved in a timely manner. This process should align with the updated building safety strategy described in Recommendation 1.**

STATUS UPDATE: The FMD Coordinator gathers information from physical observation of fire drills, feedback from other FMD personnel, tenant feedback from after-action reviews, and tracks any issues in a consolidated fire drill tracker. The Coordinator addresses these issues by submitting work orders and communicating with responsible parties as appropriate. This system has operated effectively since implemented. For example, the Coordinator observed occupants evacuating prior to a drill because they had received advance notice and did not wish to participate. Many of these occupants, however, worked on floors that were not planned to be part of the drill and would not have been affected, which resulted in wasted work time due to incorrect information. The

Coordinator recorded this information and followed up with tenants and floor wardens about the issue and the benefits of conducting drills as if a real emergency were occurring.

IMPACT: Developing a system that gathers feedback from a variety of sources, communicating issues to relevant parties, and following up until issues are resolved are key to a successful emergency response that ensures the safety of county employees. The Coordinator's direct observation and documentation of fire drills creates consistency across buildings over time, resulting in better drills and a more comprehensive assessment of issues.

### Recommendation 3

DONE



**The Facilities Management Division should develop a systematic process for identifying and addressing issues with alarm equipment functionality, through fire drills or other means, and verify that identified issues are resolved. This process should align with the updated building safety strategy described in Recommendation 1.**

STATUS UPDATE: Using the Coordinator-developed fire drill tracker facilitates the recording of and following up on equipment functionality issues. Along with drill feedback submitted by tenant and FMD security staff, the Coordinator also collects FMD building engineer reports about equipment performance during drills. The Coordinator ensures work orders are submitted for faults and repairs are completed.

IMPACT: Consolidating observation and issue tracking into the Coordinator role streamlined the fire drill process and allowed FMD to track both equipment and non-equipment-related issues by using the same format, by the same person. Because the Coordinator tracks all types of faults, there is now an added layer of accountability ensuring work orders are submitted (the Coordinator observes issues during drills) and issues are tracked until completion (using the fire drill tracker for all types of faults identified during drills). Now, FMD more thoroughly identifies and remediates equipment and non-equipment issues during fire drills.

### Recommendation 4

DONE



**The Facilities Management Division (FMD) should ensure that public address (PA) systems are tested on a regular basis to ensure identification and resolution of issues with PA system functionality, including issues related to user error. This process should align with the updated building safety strategy described in Recommendation 1.**

STATUS UPDATE: FMD tests PA systems during fire drills and after business hours to ensure they function correctly. The Coordinator records faults identified into the fire drill tracker and ensures necessary work orders are submitted. For example, FMD identified when the PA system in the King County Courthouse broadcasted a pre-recorded generic alert instead of a live voice prompt read by staff at the fire panel. The Coordinator tracked the issue, and FMD addressed the fault so correct content would be broadcast in the future.

IMPACT: By regularly testing and addressing any issues with the PA system, FMD will ensure the correct critical information will be broadcast to the right audience at the right time during an

emergency. The coordinator's regular fire drill observation and issue tracking system is key to establishing consistent system testing and performance.

## Recommendation 5

OPEN



**The Facilities Management Division (FMD) should ensure that wayfinding maps are accurate, include all elements required by Seattle Fire Code, and are posted in public areas of FMD-managed buildings. This process should align with the updated building safety strategy described in Recommendation 1.**

STATUS UPDATE: FMD has not yet conducted work to identify and update information missing from wayfinding maps. FMD delayed this work due to space consolidation and pending building reconfiguration efforts across the county. Instead, FMD established feedback mechanisms for tenants to report egress problems encountered during fire drills and for departments to submit evaluations of wayfinding maps when they occupy new spaces. While helpful to identify some issues, this does not directly address the problem of wayfinding maps lacking elements required by fire code. FMD plans to have wayfinding maps updated by fourth quarter of 2022.

## Recommendation 6

DONE



**The King County Executive should develop, document, communicate, train, and implement a process to ensure that there are individualized emergency plans for staff who are unable to evacuate independently. This process should align with the updated building safety strategy described in Recommendation 1.**

STATUS UPDATE: The FMD Coordinator drafted guidance to agencies for developing individualized evacuation plans and worked with the King County Disability Equity Network to gather feedback on the process. The Coordinator provided agencies information about the need for individualized plans and shared resources to support agencies as they develop plans. This approach explicitly refrains from collecting personally identifiable information, and instead pushes the resources and needs for these plans to agencies so leadership may have these discussions with employees in private.

IMPACT: Individualized evacuation plans developed at the agency level between department leadership and its employees reduces risks associated with violating their protected personally identifiable information. Because fire drills occur annually, the fire drill dialogue process offers a continuous feedback cycle and provides reinforcement for departments to institutionalize plans for current and new employees. FMD reports that its approach was well-received by the King County Disability Equity Network and was published on its SharePoint resource site.

## Recommendation 7

OPEN



**The Facilities Management Division should document, communicate, train, and implement processes to ensure preparation and practice for non-evacuation emergencies. This process**

**should include completing the active shooter emergency plan and should align with the updated building safety strategy described in Recommendation 1.**

STATUS UPDATE: FMD is developing a long-term plan for overhauling security training for county employees through a collaborative effort with the King County Sheriff's Office, but states that this initiative is only just beginning and may not be realized for over a year. FMD has not yet developed the missing active shooter emergency action plan but recently hired new security personnel who will be responsible for completing the plan. FMD has not yet developed guidance or training for non-evacuation emergencies, but states it is working with the Department of Human Resources to clarify responsibilities.

## Recommendation 8

PROGRESS



**The Facilities Management Division (FMD) should review all locked doors in the path of egress for compliance with the Seattle Fire Code. Where locks are not allowable, including for the Yesler Building stairwells, FMD should remove any locks or obstructions that prevent people from exiting through the path of egress.**

STATUS UPDATE: The Coordinator developed a mechanism to solicit feedback through an after-action review in which tenants state whether barriers to egress were encountered. However, this system relies on continued communication with tenants through the after-action review process, which FMD states has received low participation so far. Additionally, with fire drills occurring on only some floors at any given time, egress problems could exist for up to a year before a barrier is discovered during the next fire drill.

Regarding the Yesler Building stairwell, FMD conducted a site visit with the Seattle Fire Department and confirmed it did not meet the requirements of an I-3 building and that the doors must be available for egress in an emergency. FMD initiated a capital project to replace the locks for compliance with fire code, and the work was completed and tested for functionality. FMD is waiting for a site visit from the Seattle Fire Department to confirm fire code compliance.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, FMD needs confirmation from the Seattle Fire Department that the updated door locks in the Yesler Building are in compliance with fire code. Additionally, FMD needs to establish a mechanism for assessing egress routes and confirm that existing barriers are sufficiently removed. While asking tenants to identify barriers to egress is a valuable form of input, more is needed to actively assess whether barriers exist elsewhere. This is especially true if agencies continue to show low participation in the after-action review process. FMD currently conducts after-hours tests of equipment functionality, which may provide a routine opportunity to assess whether routes of egress are free from obstructions.

---

Brian Crist conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor's Office at [KCAO@KingCounty.gov](mailto:KCAO@KingCounty.gov) or 206-477-1033.