

February 3, 2021

**M E M O R A N D U M - D R A F T**

**To:** Public Safety & Human Services Committee  
**From:** Carlos D. Lugo, Analyst  
**Subject:** Council Bill 119996 – Changes to the Fire Code

---

On February 9, 2021, the Public Safety & Human Services Committee (Committee) will discuss and may vote on Council Bill (CB) 119996 detailing changes to the Seattle Fire Code.

This memorandum provides (1) background of the legislation; and (2) a description of the notable proposed changes in the Seattle Fire Code.

**Background**

Under [RCW 19.27.031](#) and [RCW 19.27.110](#), counties and cities are required to adopt and enforce the state building code which includes various codes published by the International Code Council (ICC). These include:

- The International Building Code;
- The International Residential Code;
- The International Mechanical Code;
- The International Fire Code; and
- Portions of the International Wildland Urban Interface Code.

Seattle last updated its fire code in 2016 through [Ordinance 125138](#). Seattle updates its fire codes approximately every three years, following the International Fire Code (IFC) update cycle. Typically, both the State and the City pass updates to their fire codes about a year after the ICC publishes the IFC. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, Washington State's effective date for the 2018 IFC was delayed until February 1, 2021. Through passage of CB 119996, the City would update the 2018 Fire Code as adopted by Washington State to include Seattle specific amendments. Many of these amendments have been included in Seattle Fire Codes in prior years and are re-introduced in this version of the Seattle Fire Code as well, providing a consistent regulatory environment. By including the Seattle amendments, the City is able to address and clarify issues relevant to City residents and operations that are not addressed in the IFC. The proposed Seattle amendments have been developed over the course of the previous four years with the Seattle Fire Code Advisory Board (FCAB) whose members represent the public, labor, business, industries, and technical and professional disciplines. The FCAB was established by ordinance in the 1950s. Its members are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by Council.

## **Notable Changes**

CB 119996 includes several notable changes to the Seattle Fire Code. The first would allow alternative fuel vehicles that are on display inside buildings (such as in a mall) to maintain their batteries connected in order to keep their safety systems active. The current fire codes require that the battery be disconnected to prevent accidental ignition of combustible fuel. The Seattle amendments would further clarify that vehicle batteries can either be disconnected or that the starting system can be made inoperable to comply with fire safety regulations.

The second change would add exceptions that allow for increased flexibility in storing combustible materials within buildings that are protected by a fire sprinkler system.

The third change would integrate new testing requirements for high-rise buildings that assure that fire protection and life safety systems work together as intended. This change would require that joint system tests are conducted at minimum every 10 years.

Additional changes would include a new chapter addressing energy systems that were not included in the current fire code, basic protection requirements for building occupants and emergency responders, and new requirements for the mobile fueling industry which allow for the fueling of motor vehicles in designated areas such as parking lots that meet certain requirements. The Seattle amendments would additionally include updated classifications of the vehicles that could be used for mobile fueling and would add further fire safety requirements.

In addition to the changes in the IFC and the Seattle amendments, CB 119996 also includes ratify and confirm language in Section Nine (9). This would allow the City to synchronize the Seattle Fire Department's permit review and processing with the rest of the City's building codes.

cc: Dan Eder, Interim Director