

Minnesota Department of Public Safety State Fire Marshal Division

Crowd Managers, Fire Watches, and Stand-by Firefighters

Although these sound like similar functions, there are differences between crowd managers, fire watches, and standby firefighters. This information sheet is intended to identify the differences.

What is a crowd manager?

Studies have shown that people often look to staff for guidance during an emergency. Crowd managers are facility employees (security guards, bouncers, ushers, and off-duty law enforcement). Although this may vary slightly based on the building or facility, typical crowd manager duties include:

- Maintaining clear paths of egress.
- Assuring that occupant load limits are not exceeded.
- Assuring that fire safety announcements are made prior to the event or program.
- Initiating fire alarms and evacuation signals.
- Directing or assisting occupants to exits in an orderly manner.

When is a crowd manager required?

When the event or facility involves more than 500 people. The ratio of crowd managers to people is 1:250 with a minimum of two although this ratio can be increased to 1:500 or 1:1,000 if the facility has a fire sprinkler system.

What is a fire watch?

The Minnesota State Fire Code defines a “fire watch” as: “A temporary measure intended to ensure continuous and systematic surveillance of a building or portion thereof by one or more qualified individuals for the purposes of identifying and controlling fire hazards, detecting early signs of unwanted fire, raising an alarm of fire and notifying the fire department.” Fire watch duties include:

- Watching for fires by constant patrols of the building or site
- Removing or correcting obstructions to means of egress
- Eliminating fire hazards
- Initiating the evacuation of occupants
- Notifying the fire department
- Extinguishing small fires
- Assisting in evacuation



When is a fire watch required?

Fire watches are required when the fire code official feels that it is essential to have someone on duty to perform the above duties when:

- There are large numbers of people anticipated or involved.
- The event involves potential risks.
- Fire protection systems are out of service and the building is still occupied.
- Following hot work operations.

What are standby firefighters?

Trained personnel with equipment to perform basic firefighting duties who are at a site when the fire safety risks are high. Standby firefighters are equipped for firefighting duties (personal protective equipment), have firefighting equipment (either apparatus or in-building systems), can perform emergency medical services, and have two-way radios. Due to the risks involved there are typically two or more standby firefighters working an event. Standby firefighter duties include:

- Inspecting the building or facility prior to the event.
- Verifying the operational readiness of fire protection and firefighting equipment.
- Removing or correcting obstructions to means of egress.
- Eliminating fire hazards.
- Extinguishing fires.
- Operating or activating built-in fire protection equipment.
- Providing emergency medical services (as needed).
- Assisting in evacuation.

When are standby firefighters required?

Standby firefighters are required when there are serious fire safety risks or concerns. Examples:

- Buildings with 5,000 or more occupants where the fire protection system is out of service
- Fireworks displays (indoor or outdoor)
- Productions, shows, and events using open flames

Function	Who Are They	Primary Duties
Crowd managers	Employees, vendors, or volunteers	Manage crowds, assist in evacuation
Fire watches	Qualified/trained personnel	Watch for fire hazards, notify occupants, provide safety when fire protection systems are temporarily out of service
Standby firefighters	Trained and equipped firefighters	Firefighting and emergency medical services