

WINTERIZATION REQUIREMENT NOTES & INFORMATION

The “Butler Ordinance”

The intent of the ordinance, Section 43.03(d)(e) of the Saint Paul Legislative Code, is to reduce the potential of fire or explosions in the City’s neighborhoods due to a natural gas build up in a vacant building. The ordinance was approved by the City Council in mid-2009 and the first letters to affected property owners and representatives were mailed Jan. 15, 2010.

What is Required?

- A.** The orders to implement the ordinance posted 1/15/10 and require the following of applicable Category II & III Registered Vacant Buildings existing at that time:

VACANT BUILDING REQUIREMENT NOTICE

Section 43.03 of the Legislative Code requires that Category II and Category III vacant buildings be winterized with gas and water services shutoff or, alternatively, that an excess flow gas valve be installed in each dwelling unit of such buildings within thirty (30) days from the date of this notice.

Please note that the installation of an excess flow gas valve must be performed by a licensed contractor with an approved permit. Further information regarding permits is available at 651-266-8989. Additionally, failure to satisfy this requirement may result in the enforcement officer, under the authority of Chapter 45 of the Legislative Code, to enter the building and to install the excess flow valve(s). All costs will then be charged against the property as a special assessment to be collected in the same manner as property taxes.

For further information on these requirements or to arrange an appointment to verify that the property is in compliance, please contact Jeff Hawkins at jeff.hawkins@ci.stpaul.mn.us or 651-266-9083 or Tom Ferrara at 651-266-9087.

- B.** The requirement above also applies to newly “opened” Category II & III Registered Vacant Buildings, with the only exception being a sixty (60) day deadline to comply from the date the property was declared a Vacant Building.

How to Satisfy the Winterization Requirements?

The following options for compliance are available:

- “Winterize” (shutoff the gas and water supplies to all units) the property; or
- Install an excess flow valve (EFV) between the gas meter and the home; or
- Open and maintain current building renovation permits.

- A.** If the gas and water services are already shutoff or are in the process of being shutoff, please submit a written statement declaring such with the property address and shutoff dates, plus any supporting documentation to Jeff Hawkins (651-266-9083) at jeff.hawkins@ci.stpaul.mn.us and Thomas Ferrara (651-266-9087) at tom.ferrara@ci.stpaul.mn.us. You may also deliver the information to the Department of Safety and Inspections, Attn: Vacant Building Winterization, 375 Jackson Street, Suite 220, Saint Paul, MN 55101 (651-266-8989).
- B.** Install an Excess Flow Valve (EFV) between the gas meter and the building. A permit is required and a licensed plumber/mechanical contractor must install the valve. The discounted gas/mechanical permit price is \$25.00. More information on the EFV follows in this document.
- C.** Order a Code Compliance Inspection and maintain a current Code Compliance Report with open permits for ongoing renovation. For more information on Code Compliance Inspections contact the Information & Complaint Line at 651-266-8989. Please note, Code Compliance Reports expire in one year.

What is an Excess Flow Valve?

An Excess Flow Valve (EFV) is a device that shuts off gas to a house if the flow of gas into the building exceeds a level necessary for its gas appliances. The EFV is activated by significant gas leaks or overpressure surges that occur when pipes rupture inside the structure due to floods, appliances being moved improperly during cleaning/servicing, copper theft, etc. The valves are mandated by local governments in California for earthquake safety and are a proven method to automatically provide expedient and safe gas shutoff in an emergency. Saint Paul’s pioneering use of them to reduce or eliminate the risk of fire or explosion in vacant buildings is a relatively inexpensive solution in comparison to others proposed, plus addresses concerns voiced by property owners and the real estate community hoping to keep vacant homes heated.

What is the Timeline?

It is the property owner's responsibility to demonstrate compliance within the thirty (30) day deadline ordered in the initial "Notice" posted 1/15/2010 to properties with existing Category II or III Registered Vacant Building files or within the sixty (60) day deadline from the opening of a new file. If compliance is not verified, DSI staff will systematically issue Summary Abatement Orders with a ten (10) day deadline to winterize and/or install an Excess Flow Valve. Failure to comply with the abatement order will result in City staff and/or hired contractors entering the property to install the valve at the owner's expense. All costs are charged against the property as a special assessment to be collected in the same manner as property taxes. As of 1/15/2010, the cost of a City Abatement for installation of the valves was approaching \$600.00, not including the expense of gaining entry to the building and re-securing it.

If You Do Not Own or Represent the Property?

The initial "Butler Ordinance" mailing list was assembled using a data feed of Ramsey County's "Owner of Record," plus multiple past contact persons and/or ownership representatives to assure the information was widely disseminated. Ultimately, any penalties will be the responsibility of the current legal owner and/or attached to the property taxes. Therefore, if you no longer are the legal owner or a representative thereof, you may disregard any notices received.

For the most up-to-date ownership information, contact Ramsey County's general Tax and Property Information line at 651.266.2000 or send an email to AskPropertyTaxandRecords@co.ramsey.mn.us.

More Questions?

For further information on these requirements, to submit information regarding a property's status, and/or to arrange an appointment to verify that the property is in compliance, please contact the following City of Saint Paul, Department of Safety & Inspections staff:

Jeff Hawkins
651-266-9083
Fax (651) 266-1919
jeff.hawkins@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Thomas Ferrara
(651) 266-9087
Fax (651) 266-1919
tom.ferrara@ci.stpaul.mn.us

City of Saint Paul, Information & Complaint Line
651-266-8989