



AGENDA REPORT

Department: Fire Department
Prepared by: Walter Amedee, Emergency Manager
Meeting Date: Tuesday, May 6, 2025
Approved by: Scott W. Huth, Interim City Manager

SUBJECT:

Public Hearing and Adoption of an Ordinance Amending Chapter 15.29 of the National City Municipal Code Establishing a Fire Inspection Program.

RECOMMENDATION:

Hold Public Hearing and Adopt an Ordinance by Second Reading, Entitled, "An Ordinance of the City Council of the City of National City, California, Amending Chapter 15.29 of the National City Municipal Code to Establish an Annual and Biennial Fire Inspection Program as Well as a Self-Inspection Program for Low-Risk Commercial Businesses.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE PRIOR ACTION:

Not Applicable.

EXPLANATION:

The National City Fire Department performs fire inspections under the direction of the Division Chief/Fire Marshal. The Community Risk Reduction Division consists of one Division Chief/Fire Marshal, one Deputy Fire Marshal, three Fire Inspectors, and one Administrative Secretary. Fire inspections are critical for maintaining public safety by ensuring compliance with the California Fire Code, California Code of Regulations - Title 24, Part 9, based on the International Fire Code.

The Community Risk Reduction Division's primary goal is to prevent fires before they occur. This goal is achieved by ensuring existing and newly constructed properties have appropriate fire protection and life safety systems. The Department's fire inspection program is essential in reducing risks to the community, supported by comprehensive training standards that align with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), California Fire Code, and National City Municipal Code (NCCMC).

The Community Risk Reduction Division utilizes three Fire Inspectors and a Deputy Fire Marshal to conduct inspections, covering approximately 2,743 properties annually. National City, with a population of 57,000 over 9.12 square miles, includes a diverse array of structures such as industrial facilities, commercial properties, residential areas, and historically significant buildings. The City receives fees to cover the costs of the inspections. These fees vary by business type and size.

Annual Fire Inspections

Fire inspections are essential for identifying and mitigating fire hazards. State law requires all hotels, motels, lodging houses, apartment houses, schools, hospitals, jails and high-rises to be

inspected annually. There are additional high-risk facilities, due to the nature of their operations and occupancy levels that should be inspected annually in order to mitigate fire hazards and ensure health and safety. It is recommended by staff that the following occupancies in National City receive annual fire inspections:

Group A – The use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, for the gathering of persons for purposes such as civic, social, or religious functions; recreation, food or drink consumption; or awaiting transportation or motion Picture and Television Production Studio Sound Stages.

Group B – “Restaurants Only” – Includes among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, that involves the use of open flames.

Group C – Programs and facilities established for the purpose of providing an outdoor group living experience with social, spiritual, education, or recreational objective for five days or more.

Group F – Includes, among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, for assembling, disassembling, fabricating, finishing, manufacturing, packaging, repair, or processing operations.

Group H – Includes among others, the use of building or structure, or portion thereof, that involves the manufacturing, processing, generation, or storage of materials that constitute a physical or health hazard in quantities in excess of those allowed in controlled areas.

Group I – Includes, among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, in which people, cared for or living in a supervised environment and having physical limitations because of health or age are harbored for medical treatment or other care or treatment, or in which people are detained for penal or correctional purposes or in which the liberty of the occupancy is restricted.

Group L – A room, building, or area where the use and storage of hazardous materials are utilized for testing, analysis, instruction, research, or developmental activities.

Group M – Among others, the use of a building or structure, or portion thereof, for the display and sale of merchandise, and involving stocks of goods, wares or merchandise incidental to such to purposes and accessible to the public.

Group S – Includes among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, for storage that is not classified as a hazardous occupancy.

These properties present significant fire risks due to their high occupancy levels, sensitive populations (e.g., elderly residents) etc., or potential hazards related to industrial activities. Regular inspections are necessary to maintain fire safety and protect these vulnerable sectors of the community. Inspections of these occupancy types would be subject to an annual fee.

Proposed Business Self-Inspection Program

To balance resources and enhance fire safety compliance, the Fire Department proposes the implementation of a Business Self-Inspection Program. This program would allow low-risk commercial businesses to conduct yearly self-inspections, focusing on easily manageable fire safety measures such as ensuring fire extinguishers are serviced, exits are clear, and storage is

properly maintained around fire protection equipment. Business owners/managers could request the assistance of a fire inspector, if desired. A fee would be charged for this service.

A Business Self-Inspection Form will be developed to guide business owners through the process. The form will include a checklist of basic fire safety requirements that can be easily verified by the business owners. The form will also be designed to be user-friendly and provide clear instructions on how to correct any deficiencies. To ensure widespread participation and compliance, the Business Self-Inspection Form will be distributed with the annual business license renewal process. Business will be encouraged to complete the Self-Inspection Forms but it will not be required.

Biennial In-Person Fire Inspections

In addition to the Business Self-Inspection Program, the Fire Department will conduct an in-person fire inspection every two years for all businesses not subject to annual fire inspections. This biennial fire inspection ensures that fire safety standards are consistently upheld and allows the department to identify and address any issues that may not be visible through self-assessment alone. These businesses would be subject to a biennial fire inspection fee.

This approach would allow the Fire Department to focus its resources on Target Hazards and higher-risk properties while maintaining a strong level of fire safety compliance across all commercial businesses.

Conclusion

The City Council held a public hearing at their meeting of April 1, 2025, and introduced the Ordinance. The City Council voted 4-1 in favor of approving the Introduction of the Ordinance. Staff is recommending adoption of the Ordinance tonight. The Code Amendment would then take effect 30 days from the date of adoption.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT:

The fees charged for conducting fire safety inspections offset the cost for performing the service. Under the proposed revisions to Chapter 15.29 of the NCMC, staff expects, at full implementation, the annual revenue from the fire inspection fees to be approximately \$453,350.

RELATED CITY COUNCIL 2020-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

Public Safety

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

This is not a project under CEQA, and is therefore, not subject to environmental review. CCR15378; PRC 21065.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION:

The Agenda Report was posted at least 72 hours before the Regular Meeting date and time, and 24 hours before a Special Meeting in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act.

ORDINANCE:

Second Reading and Adoption

EXHIBITS:

Exhibit A - Ordinance

Exhibit B – NCMC Chapter 15.29 – Fire Inspection (Clean)