

All About Approvals

Fire Alarm equipment is tested and listed, and/or approved by nationally recognized testing organizations and certifying agencies within the U.S. to ensure that applicable products meet the performance requirements of the Standards and Codes of such regulatory authorities. In addition, certain jurisdictions may have their own approval or certification process, which supplements national standards.

Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL) and Factory Mutual (FM) Global are the most universally recognized certification organizations within the Fire Alarm industry. FM Approvals are usually required by Mutual insurance companies for coverage of buildings that utilize Fire Alarm equipment. Material and Equipment Acceptance (MEA) for New York City, California State Fire Marshal (CSFM) for California, City of Chicago, Maryland State Fire Marshal (MSFM) for Maryland and City of Denver are examples of recognized State or City Authorities having Jurisdiction (AHJ) that concern themselves with Fire requirements.

By comparison, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) develops model Codes that serve as the technical basis to install, operate and maintain Fire Alarm systems and equipment. Such NFPA Code serves as a foundation for building codes, as well as State and local fire codes.

Only Fire Alarm products that meet or exceed the multitude of national and local requirements should be considered for utmost public safety and protection of property.

Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. (UL)

Founded in 1894, Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. (UL) is an independent, not-for-profit product safety testing and certification organization. UL's focus is on conformity assessment in the areas of electrical devices, programmable systems and quality processes. They conduct almost 100,000 product evaluations annually, in accordance with more than 1,250 UL Standards.

In 2003, UL updated its Standard for Control Units and Accessories for Fire Alarm Systems (UL 864) to better align with prevailing Standards and Codes. This "9th Edition" of the UL 864 Standard encompasses more than 180 revisions to UL requirements. Some of the key changes include response time improvements, enhanced immunity to RF Interference, better synchronization with Notification Appliances, greater software integrity and broadened programming requirements. In addition, the 9th Edition of UL 864 includes updates in supervision and monitoring, along with compatibility and power transmission.

Products that are listed in accordance with the 9th Edition of UL 864 carry with them the confidence and assurance of meeting, or exceeding, the latest industry requirements and standards of safety for Fire Alarm systems.

Factory Mutual (FM)

For nearly two centuries, Factory Mutual (FM) Global has been preventing property loss by managing exposure with improvements in safety. Through scientific research and testing, FM Approval certifies industrial and commercial products in compliance with its own Standards, or other nationally recognized requirements such as those of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The "FM Approved" mark is essentially a third-party certification that products conform to the highest standards and reduce or eliminate property exposure, and thus, risk of loss.

FM Approval for Fire Alarm products concentrates on Fire Detection, Signaling and Other Electrical Equipment. FM Approval Standards follow NFPA 72 guidance, and also focus on Central Station Service for Fire Alarms and Protective Equipment Supervision.

Material and Equipment Acceptance (MEA), New York City

The New York City Department of Buildings ensures the safe and lawful use of over 900,000 buildings and properties by enforcing the City's various building and electrical codes. Equipment such as Fire Alarms require Department of Buildings acceptance, to ensure that such products meet the national standards required by the Building Code.

Products must be tested by a Department-accepted testing laboratory or testing service. Upon successful completion of the third party tests and the acceptance of the results by the New York City Department of Buildings, Fire Alarm products can then be installed in New York City.

California State Fire Marshal (CSFM)

The mission of the Office of the California State Fire Marshal (CSFM) is to protect life and property through the development of fire protection engineering, education and enforcement. CSFM Listing and approval provides a resource for architects, engineers, local fire and building officials and other State agencies by ensuring that "Listed" products used throughout California have met recognized fire related performance standards; thereby eliminating the need for verification by all parties concerned with performance.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal's (SFM) Building Materials Listing (BML) Program was created to mandate that all Fire Alarm systems and devices be approved and listed by the SFM, prior to sale or installation within the State of California.

CSFM Listings are based upon technical data submitted by applicants. The CSFM Fire Engineering staff reviews test results and/or other data, but does not make an independent verification of any claims. Data such as that from the UL Listing or FM Approval process can be utilized in support of the CSFM Listing.

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City of Chicago

The Municipal Code of Chicago, IL stipulates that Fire Alarm systems with automatic detectors must be installed in Schools, Hotels, Institutional buildings, Dormitories, Care facilities and other places of public assembly and occupancy. All equipment used in such installations must be tested and bear the Label of Approval of a nationally recognized laboratory (such as UL or FM), which is acceptable to the Division Marshal in charge of fire protection (Fire Commissioner) and the Bureau of Electrical Inspection.

Prior to Approval, the City of Chicago also requires physical demonstration and Chicago-specific performance verification as part of its process.

Maryland State Fire Marshal (MSFM)

The mission of Maryland's Office of the State Fire Marshal is the protection of life and property from fire and explosion through quality fire protection engineering services, aggressive investigation, enforcement of Code and public education. It is unlawful to sell, offer for sale or install any Fire Alarm system in Maryland that has not been tested and listed by a laboratory (such as UL or FM), recognized by the State Fire Marshal.

The State Fire Prevention Code establishes minimum requirements in accordance with NFPA Code.

City of Denver

The Denver Fire Department's Fire Prevention Bureau provides for fire and building code enforcement, public safety, research and testing of new materials and technologies. Fire Alarm systems must be approved by the Bureau's Systems Inspection and Testing section prior to installation.

Denver Approval requires a UL Listed or FM Approved Fire Alarm system. In addition, field demonstration and Denver-specific performance verification is also a required part of the process.

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