

Seattle Permits

—part of a multi-departmental series on City services & permitting

Key Boxes for Emergency Access

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Knox Rapid Entry System

Used by Fire Departments throughout the country, the primary component of the Knox Rapid Entry System is a key box unique to the jurisdiction in which it is located. Only the Seattle Fire Department has the key to open Fire Department access boxes located within our city. Use of the system can improve emergency access to buildings and result in savings by eliminating property damage from Fire Department forced entry.

Use of the Knox Rapid Entry System is authorized by Section 506 of the 2012 Seattle Fire Code. The Code specifies that the Fire Department may require a key box containing access keys be installed at the entrance to structures or areas where access for the purpose of life safety or fire fighting is restricted. While the Fire Department can require that a Knox Entry System is installed, in most instances installation of the system will be at the option of the building owner.

The Knox model 3200 or 4400 single core key box with hinged doors are the only boxes approved for new installations in the City of Seattle. Existing installations of other models of Knox boxes are still allowed. A Knox Multi-Purpose Electrical Switch may be installed inside a box for emergency entry to electric gates.

Examples of structures for which a rapid entry key box may be beneficial include:

- Warehouse, industrial, commercial and other buildings where 24 hour staffing / security is not available.
- Buildings constructed such that Fire Department forced entry, if required, would be unduly difficult

or likely result in significant property damage.

- Buildings with a high frequency of emergency response incidents and where occupants may be endangered due to delays gaining access.
- Hospitals, nursing home and high-rise buildings.
- Hazardous materials occupancies.

How Does it Work?

A building owner installs, or arranges for installation, of a Knox key box on the exterior of the building at the main entrance point. The box is manufactured with a lock which can be opened only with a key that is issued solely to the Seattle Fire Department. Medical aid units and fire trucks in Seattle are each equipped with one Knox box key, held in a special security device.

When *emergency* access is required, the arriving Fire Department member in charge removes the key from the special security device in their Fire Department vehicle and opens the Knox box to remove the building main entrance key. After use, the Fire Department member returns the entrance key to the key box and locks it, and then returns the special Knox box key to the security device inside the emergency vehicle.

Steps for Installing the Knox Rapid Entry System

When an occupancy chooses or is directed to install a key box, a model 3200 or 4400 (single core) series box may be purchased from the Knox Company or authorized Knox retailer. Where installation allows, a recessed box is recommended. Upon purchase, the Knox box can be shipped directly from the manufacturer to the purchaser absent its locking mechanism. The lock is shipped to and remains in the possession of the Seattle Fire Department until the box installation has been approved by the Fire Department.

The purchaser installs the empty box according to the included installation guidelines. Once the box is installed, the purchaser makes an appointment to meet

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a Seattle Fire Department Inspector at the building to approve the box location and integrity of the installation. Upon approval, the building owner places the appropriate key for the main access entrance and life safety systems inside the box. The Fire Department Inspector installs the lock, closes the door and locks the box.

A Knox box is designed to contain only the key to the main entrance of the building and life safety systems. As an additional security precaution, a building-wide pass key is not recommended for placement in any access key box.

Once the Knox key box is installed, the building owner should contact the Seattle Fire Marshal's Office at (206) 386-1450 to schedule an inspection of the installation for compliance with the Knox installation guidelines and to have the building entrance key placed inside the Knox box. Future access to add or remove a key from the box should be coordinated by calling (206) 386-1450 to make an appointment.

Installation Location

The building owner is responsible for installation of the Knox key box. It must be securely mounted on the building exterior at a general height of six feet, and within five feet of the primary Fire Department access point, such as an addressed main door or metal gate post. Installation diagrams are included with every box, and online at <http://www.knoxbox.com>. Any deviation from the published installation instructions must be pre-approved by the Fire Marshal's Office.

Exclusions

One- and Two-Family Residences

In order to be approved for residential use, Knox boxes must be installed in a manner consistent with one of the installation diagrams included with the individual box or online at <http://www.knoxbox.com>.

Gates

In certain situations, it may be possible to properly and safely install a Knox Box to control a mechanically powered gate. However, all proposals to install a Knox Box to house a key or gate switch require prior review and approval by the Seattle Fire Marshal. Please contact (206) 386-1450 for more information.

Inspection Fee

During the inspection, the purchaser completes an

Inspection Agreement which authorizes the Seattle Fire Department to invoice a one-time inspection fee of \$185 (current as of 2015) per box. This fee offsets costs for box inspection, installing the lock core, future trips to remove or add keys, and administrative services for handling and administering the Knox program.

Employees of the Seattle Fire Department may not be involved with the sale, promotion or installation of the Knox Rapid Entry System or any Knox Company product.

Other Knox Box Applications

High-Rise Buildings

A Knox box may be installed in the fire control room of a high-rise building for the storage of pass keys to various areas of that building. The Knox box must be readily identifiable and located in a conspicuous area of the fire control room.

Hazardous Materials Permit Information

A Knox document storage box may be required at selected facilities that would present a significant life safety hazard in the event of an emergency. Those buildings which require installation of a document storage box shall install the box adjacent to or in close proximity (within two feet) to the Knox key box.

Knox Multi-Purpose Electrical Switch

This device can be used by emergency responders to open electrically operated doors and gates. This switch is installed in a regular 3200 or 4400 series box.

Status of Non-Knox Rapid Entry System Key Boxes

In instances where an occupancy has been required to provide a key box under an earlier edition of the Fire Code, and the box in place is not a Knox box, the responsible party may be notified in writing to replace the box with a Knox key box. Responsible persons will be notified following the regular annual inspection of their occupancy.

If a building owner has voluntarily provided a key box where one is not required, and the box is not a Knox key box, the owner will be asked if he/she still desires the Fire Department to have key access to the occupancy. If the answer is yes, the owner will be directed to replace the existing key box with a Knox key box. The Fire Department will no longer use any access key box other than the Knox Rapid Entry System.

Elevator Key Boxes

The Seattle Building Code requires that a key box be installed near elevators to hold keys necessary for access to elevator machinery and controls. For elevators with Phase I recall, the key box must be located on the designated recall floor, above the recall switch. When no recall feature exists, the elevator key box should be located above the elevator call button, approximately six feet above the floor level.

The elevator key box may contain keys for the machine room door, secondary level door, pit door, roof door, fire emergency service, hoistway access, mechanical hoistway access devices and miscellaneous switch keys. An elevator key box can be obtained from most locksmiths.

The box requirements must meet Seattle Building Code key box specifications. The boxes must be labeled “For Fire Department Use” and should be red, unless located in the main lobby directly above the elevator call button. The lock specification is a one-inch cylinder cam lock key #39504.

Questions

If you have questions about requirements for the Knox Rapid Entry System, or need to schedule an appointment to finalize installation of your Knox key box, call the Seattle Fire Department Fire Prevention Division at (206) 386-1450 during regular business hours.

Guide to Obtaining a Knox Box

If a Knox box is required, the responsible party will be notified in writing by the Seattle Fire Department of the need to obtain one. A Knox box may not be required or recommended for your building. For clarification, contact the Seattle Fire Marshal’s Office at (206) 386-1450.

1. If you have been directed to install a Knox box, or have voluntarily made the decision to obtain one, contact your preferred lock vendor or visit the Knox Company website at www.knoxbox.com. Only the 3200 or 4400 (single core) series boxes with hinged doors (with or without tamper switch) are currently approved for use in the City of Seattle.
2. Once your Knox box is purchased, the Knox Company will ship your box directly to you. The box is shipped without a locking mechanism which will be installed separately by the Seattle Fire Department’s Fire

Prevention Division.

3. Mount the Knox box according to the manufacturer’s specifications, unless authorization has been obtained from the Fire Marshal’s Office for an alternate method. Only boxes installed according to these specifications will be approved for use. The Knox specifications and Fire Department information bulletin are provided with the box at pick up and also may be viewed on each organization’s web site.
4. **Please note: The Seattle Fire Department will not install their locking mechanism into your box until the installation of the box has been inspected and approved for strict compliance with these installation requirements.**
5. Once your box is installed, and within 30 days of purchase, contact the Seattle Fire Marshal’s Office at (206) 386-1450 to arrange for inspection and installation of locking mechanism. Allow at least 48 hours prior notice for inspection. A Seattle Fire official will meet the building’s representative at the address for final inspection, placement of the access key(s) into the Knox box, and installation of the lock. The building’s representative will also need to provide a signature acknowledging agreement for a one-time Seattle Fire Department inspection fee of \$185 per box (current as of 2015), and pertinent billing information.

The Knox Company may be reached at: (800) 552-5669 or www.knoxbox.com