

Knox-Box® and Other Access Box Systems

704.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide information about the Knox-Box® Rapid Entry System or other access box systems and the roles and responsibilities of district members with regard to access-key security, storage and accountability. This policy shall apply to all buildings or sites within the Blue Ridge Fire District jurisdiction where it has been determined that an access-keyed device is needed or has been provided for accessibility for emergency responders (AA C R4-36-201).

704.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) premise information file - A file entered in a CAD system to automatically notify responding units of certain information, including the presence of an access box, about a facility to which they have been dispatched.

Access tag - Attached to each key in an access box to identify its function.

Knox-Box, Emergency Access Systems box or other access box - A locked box used for securely storing the keys to a gate, building or rooms within a building.

Access cabinet - A locked data cabinet used for storing information pertinent to the operation of a building, such as hazardous materials (HAZMAT) data and plant shut-down procedures. Keys to the facility can also be located within the cabinet.

Knox Company - The manufacturer/vendor of Knox-Box, cabinets, key switches, padlocks and related accessories.

Access box master key - A key carried on all fire apparatus that enables district members to unlock any keyed access box within the jurisdiction.

704.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Blue Ridge Fire District to be registered with the Knox Company or other access box system manufacturer to participate in a rapid entry system, providing safe and secure nondestructive emergency access to commercial and residential properties. Participation minimizes potential budget impacts caused by forcible entry during an emergency and allows a building to be re-secured quickly and easily by members.

The Fire Chief or the authorized designee may appoint an access box program coordinator, who shall be responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the program are administered in accordance with state fire code, local ordinance, and manufacturer requirements.

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704.3 ACCESS BOX KEY ACCOUNTABILITY

No individual member shall be issued an access box master key. Appropriate fire apparatus shall be equipped with locking units that are accessed by use of a combination lock. Once the master key is released, it should be used to access the keyed device at the location of the emergency and be immediately returned to the secured unit.

The Fire Chief is ultimately accountable for access box master keys issued to the district. Any missing master key shall be immediately reported verbally to a supervisor and followed up with a written explanation to the Fire Chief or the authorized designee by the end of the applicable/assigned shift.

Maintenance and security of the access box master keys is essential to the credibility of the program. Any loss of a master key shall be thoroughly investigated and appropriate action initiated. If the key cannot be recovered, all access box master keys in the jurisdiction may have to be replaced at district expense.

704.4 SITE INSTALLATION AND TESTING

It is a property owner's responsibility to order access keyed devices and ensure that they are installed securely in a manner and location approved by the district, in accordance with local building codes and ordinances. The reflective alert decal included with each access box should be mounted on the door or door frame adjacent to the access box. It is intended to alert fire companies to the presence of an access box.

Access boxes should be installed near the electrical panel to the building at a height not to exceed six feet. This height has proven ideal as it enables members to access the box quickly without deploying a ladder, yet is high enough to discourage tampering.

Access box key switches should be installed by a certified electrician familiar with these devices.

704.5 KEYS IN ACCESS BOXES

Every access key placed in an access box shall be identified with a sturdy key tag. Each set of keys shall be grouped together on a key ring. Tags and key rings may typically be purchased from the manufacturer at the time the access box is ordered. The keys being installed will be at the discretion of the property owner but should be selected based on the access needs of emergency responders. Keys typically installed in an access box include:

- Main entrance
- Grand master
- Elevator control
- Mechanical room
- Fire alarm panel

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- Electrical room
- Roof access
- Other secured areas deemed appropriate by the owner and/or the district

704.6 LOCK-UP OF KEYS IN ACCESS BOXES

District staff will assist the property owner in arranging for a lock-up. All keys should be tagged and ready for placement in the access box upon the arrival.

Members receiving requests for lock-up should refer the owner to the appropriate staff member or get the owner's contact information. All requests shall be forwarded to the appropriate staff member.

704.7 TESTING KEY SWITCHES

The first-in engine company will test the key switch at its earliest convenience to ensure that it works properly. The property owner does not need to be present for the test. If the key switch fails to operate, the property owner will be contacted by the engine company to have the necessary repairs made.

Once it has been determined that the access box operates properly, the access box coordinator shall be notified so that the information file can be updated to include the presence of an access box.

704.8 NUMBER OF KEY SETS REQUIRED

More than one set of keys is often required to be placed in the access box, especially in larger buildings. The extra sets of keys are needed for additional fire companies or second alarms arriving later at the same incident. The following guidelines have been established for the number of key sets required:

- Security gate only, or one- to two-story building: one set of keys
- Three to four stories: two sets of keys

704.9 ACCESS BOX TESTING

The Fire Chief or the authorized designee shall ensure that a check is performed on each access box in the jurisdiction by district staff or an engine company. This should consist of checking the operation of the box and the keys.