



Placentia Fire & Life Safety

Community Risk Reduction
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Refrigeration System Guideline

PURPOSE

The intent of this guideline is to clarify certain requirements for refrigeration systems regulated by Chapter 6 of the 2025 California Fire Code (CFC) Section 608. Not all refrigeration system requirements will be identified in this guideline.

Refrigeration systems pose a significant risk to workers and the public if refrigerant is released or leaked out in sufficient quantities. Freon-based refrigerants are the most widely used in the City of Placentia; they are colorless and odorless gases undetectable by or by our senses. Accidents around the country involving ammonia refrigeration continue to injure and kill people. Any refrigerant leak will displace oxygen in a closed area and can lead to asphyxiation.

SCOPE

This guideline is applicable to existing refrigeration systems and new systems where the amount of refrigerant in a single system exceeds 220 pounds of Group A1 or 30 pounds of any other Group. Existing systems will be regulated by the Code in effect at the time of construction or major upgrade, while new installations are regulated by the 2025 CFC. When an existing refrigeration system is upgraded or modified, the Fire Code Official will determine how the application of the two codes shall be applied.

DEFINITIONS

Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health (IDLH) – a concentration of airborne contaminants normally expressed in parts per million (ppm) or milligrams per cubic meter, which represents the maximum level from which one could escape within 30 minutes without any escape-impairing symptoms or irreversible health effects. This level is established by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). If the 2025 California Mechanical Code (CMC) does not have adequate data for IDLH, the refrigerant manufacturer or the Fire Code Official shall make a determination.

Lower Flammability Limit (LFL) – the minimum concentration of vapor in air at which propagation of flame will occur in the presence of an ignition source. LFL is sometimes referred to as LEL (Lower Explosive Limit).

Permissible Exposure Limit (PEL) – the maximum permitted eight-hour time-weighted average concentration of an airborne contaminant.

CLASSIFICATION

Refrigerants are classified into groups according to toxicity and flammability, example: *ammonia is Class B-2 while R-404A and R-507A are Class A-1.*

Toxicity Classification based on the 2025 CMC shows Class A as refrigerants with a low degree of toxicity and Class B as refrigerants with higher toxicity.

Flammability Classification based on the 2025 CMC shows Class 1 indicates low flammability, Class 2 indicates moderate flammability, and Class 3 indicates high flammability.

SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Permits and Plans

A permit is required to install or operate a mechanical refrigeration system. A system shall be subject to review by both the building department and the City of Placentia Fire and Life Safety Department (PFLSD). Installation, upgrade, retrofit, and modification plans of refrigeration systems shall be submitted for review to the PFLSD prior to installation. The plans shall include the scope of work, design details, specifications of the system, and demonstrate full compliance with applicable codes and industry standards/guidelines (such as IIAR, RETA, and ASHRAE). Plans need to specify if CFC or CMC designs are proposed, any combined use of these codes and/or standards are subject to approval by PFLSD.

- A. Access** – Refrigeration systems shall be accessible to the fire department at all times as required by the fire code official. PFLSD recommends an approved Knox key box.
- B. Emergency Fire Control Box** – Are no longer required by the CFC or the CMC. Existing refrigeration systems are expected to maintain and test their emergency fire control box. Removing or altering the emergency control box shall be approved by PFLSD. The control box for existing ammonia refrigeration systems shall be in accordance with the Code in effect at the time of construction or major upgrade, and contain a compressor shut down switch, clear emergency instructions, and the refrigeration engineer's emergency 24 hr telephone contacts.

- C. Toxic or highly toxic refrigerants. Systems containing refrigerants which are toxic or highly toxic shall discharge vapor to atmosphere only through an approved treatment or flare system (2025 CFC 608.13). Some refrigerants, such as ammonia, are subject to additional state and/or federal programs when the total facility-wide quantity exceeds 500 pounds for CalARP or 10,000 pounds for Federal RMP.
- D. Ammonia refrigerant. Systems containing ammonia refrigerant shall discharge vapor to the atmosphere only through approved treatment, flaring, or diffusion systems (2025 CFC 608.13.4). If another method of safe emergency discharge is currently in use such as a sanitary drain system, the business owner shall be required to show PFLSD that this connection and use of the drain is acceptable by the local sanitation authority.
- E. Refrigeration Machinery Rooms – When required by 2025 CMC machinery rooms (sometimes referred to as compressor or engine rooms) shall conform to specific sections. Roof mounted systems and/or equipment not sufficiently enclosed to contain refrigerant vapors need not comply with this section.
- F. The following is a summary of significant machinery room safety features:
- Vapor leak detectors to have blue visual strobes in/out of primary exits
 - Vapor leak detectors to have local audible horns in/out of primary exits
 - Normal ventilation
 - Emergency purge ventilation
 - Automatic shutdown device
 - Emergency shutdown device
 - Exit door 36" width, swing outward, panic hardware, illuminated sign
 - Automatic fire sprinklers and/or fire rated construction
- G. The following is a partial summary of refrigerated space/cold area safety features:
- Vapor leak detectors to have blue visual strobes in/out of primary exits
 - Vapor leak detectors to have local audible horns in/out of primary exits
 - Vapor tight design, no ventilation
- H. The following is a partial summary of refrigeration system safety features:
- Compressor isolation stop valves
 - Liquid receiver vessel isolation stop valves
 - Liquid condensers isolation stop valves

- Spring return (“dead man”) valves at oil drain points
 - Flow direction and identification signs on piping
 - Emergency pressure control system (systems built after 2007)
 - Automatic crossover valves (systems built after 2007)
- I. Detection and Alarm Systems: Alarm signaling devices shall sound at 15 dB above ambient noise. Alarms shall be activated in the space when the refrigerant vapor PEL is exceeded. Detection and alarm systems shall be powered and supervised as required for fire alarm systems in 2025 NFPA 72.
- J. Testing of Equipment –Installation acceptance tests must be witnessed and approved by an PFLSD inspector.
- K. Inspection: At the time of the final fire inspection, the owner/operator shall demonstrate that the leak detection, notification, automatic shut-down, and Call-Out features are functioning as per the plan design.

2. Notification of Discharges

The PFLSD shall be notified immediately upon discharge of refrigerant, whether automatic or manual. Refrigerant shall not be discharged except in an emergency. Releases or threatened releases must also be reported to the Cal OES at (800) 852-7550. 2025 CFC 608.13

3. Leak Detection and Alarms

This section’s purpose is to provide additional direction in meeting the refrigerant alarm and detection requirements of the 2025 California Fire Code and the 2025 California Mechanical Code.

- Most Machinery Rooms require refrigerant alarm and detection systems.
- Some walk-in freezers and coolers require refrigerant alarm and detection systems if refrigerant quantities exceed 2025 CMC Table 11A amounts as indicated on the PFLSD Refrigerant Disclosure Form.
- Refrigerant alarm and detection systems shall provide supervisory trouble and supervisory detection signals to an off-premises central monitoring station. It is preferred that refrigerant alarm and detection systems be connected to a Security panel or local fire alarm /sprinkler monitoring system, or directly to a refrigeration engineer under contract to respond in 30 minutes.
- Refrigerant alarm and detection signals shall not activate fire alarm/sprinkler monitoring alarm devices. Only the blue-colored horn/strobes of the refrigerant alarm and detection system shall be activated by a refrigerant detection.

- PFLSD may require refrigeration trouble and/or detection signals as alarm signals (and dispatch first responders) if unusually hazardous conditions may result from a significant refrigerant leak.

NOTE: Please complete the attached refrigerant disclosure form and include it as part of the plan submittal package. The factors are different for each refrigerant type, for example the factor for R-22 is 5.5 lb/1000cuft while the factor for R-404A is 17 lb/1000cuft.

REFRIGERANT DISCLOSURE FORM

Date: _____ Placentia Permit# (if applicable): _____

Business Name (Where system is located): _____

Complete Business Address: _____ Phone: () _____

Refrigerant Contractor or Engineering Firm: _____ Phone: () _____

Instructions:

- Column #1 Identify each refrigerant system included in this submittal.
- Column #2 List the refrigerant name and the CMC Table 1102.3 Refrigerant Concentration Limit (RCL).
- Column #3 Identify the refrigerant IDLH or PEL or LEL from Table 1102.3 (CMC).
- Column #4 Identify the total amount of refrigerant in each system (in pounds). If the amount in any single system is greater than 220 pounds of Group A1 refrigerants or 30 pounds of any other Group, submit a refrigeration plan to the PFLSD.
- Column #5 Does the refrigeration system have components located so that the leakage of refrigerant could enter a space occupied by any person? Example is a walk-in freezer or machine room. If yes, identify the volume of the smallest space occupied (in cubic feet). CMC Table 11
- Column #6 Calculate by using: column #4 divided by column #5 divided by 1000. If this value exceeds the CMC value for the specific refrigerant type, then submit a refrigeration plan, including a refrigerant alarm and detection system, to PFLSD. Provide a copy of this form to the City Building Department.
- Column #7 Does the quantity of refrigerant exceed the amount specified in CMC Table 1102.3? If yes, contact the building department and PFLSD for requirements.

PROVIDE INFORMATION IN TABLE FORMAT

[1] Identify Each System	[2] Refrigerant Name and RCL Factor	[3] IDLH or PEL or LEL	[4] Quantity of Refrigerant (Pounds)	[5] Volume of Refrigerated space (Cubic Feet)	[6] Pounds of Refrigerant per 1,000 Cubic Feet of Refrigerated Space	[7] Does Column [6] Quantity Exceed the Factor (Table 1102.3)? (Y/N)

Completed by (Print name and sign) _____

Date Completed _____

Note: If more than one system is connected to a common header or cooling tower/condenser, then the total refrigerant charge is used in Column [4]