

# NEW YORK CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION AND RESPONSE

### USE OF ACRYLIC MATERIALS (PLEXIGLAS) FOR COVID-19 PREVENTION

**Q. New York State COVID-19 guidance requires that business owners provide barriers to maintain social distance and protect their staff and business patrons from the spread of COVID-19. Many businesses are installing clear acrylic panels (Plexiglas). However, Plexiglas is combustible. Are there Fire Code restrictions on its use for this purpose?**

**A.** Yes, the use of acrylic material (Plexiglas) as a shield against COVID-19, such as in a business or assembly occupancy, is subject to Building Code and/or Fire Code regulation.

Plexiglas is a combustible material. If installed as an interior finish, Plexiglas is regulated by the New York City Building Code. If installed as a furnishing, Plexiglas is regulated by the New York City Fire Code.

Section FC802.1 of the New York City Fire Code defines “interior finish” as “Construction materials that form the exposed interior surfaces of a building and that are part of or affixed to walls, fixed or folding partitions, ceilings, and other construction elements.” Chapter 8 of the Building Code sets forth design and fire safety requirements for such materials.

FC802.1 defines “furnishing” as follows: “Furniture or items other than structural elements, building service equipment or interior finishes that are installed or placed in a building for the human comfort or other use of the occupants.” Plexiglas shields or dividers affixed to furniture or other items that are not building elements (including walls, floors and ceilings) are considered furnishings.

Because Plexiglas is combustible, special care must be taken to ensure that Plexiglas installations do not become a fire hazard. This includes the safety concerns outlined below.

Plexiglas shields and dividers must be installed in a manner that does not:

- Obstruct egress from the building or space. FC1027.3 requires that all required means of egress, including each exit, exit access and exit discharge, be continuously maintained free from obstructions and impediments to immediate use in the event of a fire or another emergency. Even if not installed directly in the path of egress, care should be taken to ensure that the shield or divider will not fall into the path of egress during a fire.
- Interfere with the fire alarm activation. Care should be taken to ensure that the shield or divider does not block or enclose a smoke, carbon monoxide or heat detector.

- Interfere with sprinkler system activation. Care should be taken to ensure that the shield or divider does not block or enclose a sprinkler head, delaying its activation and/or interfering with the water distribution pattern when activated. The minimum required clearance from sprinkler heads is 18 inches.
- Bring it too close to heat or flames. As a combustible material, Plexiglas shields and dividers must be installed a safe distance from any flame, heat source or other source of ignition. This would include radiators or other heating equipment, cooking appliances and candles.

In view of the foregoing concerns, the Fire Department encourages the use of non-combustible materials, such as Lexan (polycarbonate), as an alternative to Plexiglas. The same care is required to ensure that polycarbonate barriers do not impede egress or interfere with fire alarm or sprinkler system activation. Polycarbonate barriers are commercially available from hardware stores.

Business owners operating facilities regulated by a Federal or State agency should consult such agency for guidance. For example, the NYS Education Department has posted guidance with respect to use of Plexiglas “sneeze guards” in schools.