WEST COUNTY EMS & FIRE
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BBQ Grills in Multi-Family Buildings

Can I have a barbecue grill at my apartment or condominium?

The answer depends on whether or not the grill is on a balcony or ground level. On a balcony, it is allowed ***only if it is an electric powered grill***. Propane, charcoal or other fuels are strictly prohibited.

If the grill is stored on a ground-level surface and used only when located more than 10 feet from combustible buildings, it can be fueled by propane, charcoal or other fuels. Any deck or balcony that has direct access from the ground level by stairs or steps, sufficient to allow a cool-to-the-touch grill to be transported to or from the deck directly to or from the exterior ground level surface without going thru any interior portion of the commercial structure would be considered ground

level. Storage of a grill while not in use on such an exterior-accessed deck would be allowed by code. The presence of a roof overhang, overhead balcony or other overhead structure would not cause the "ground level" deck or balcony to be considered to be an interior portion of the commercial structure so long as the "ground level" deck or balcony is an open-air environment outside of the boundaries of the exterior surfaces of the exterior walls of the commercial building and not within the interior of any screening, sunroom or other similar type of seasonal enclosure.

Propane, charcoal or other fuel-powered grills may never be stored on a combustible balcony nor inside of a building including the storage area.

At no time may a propane cylinder be brought inside of the building for any reason, regardless of whether it is believed to be empty or full.

When did the rules change?

The use of propane grills, gas grills and/or charcoal grills on combustible balconies is strictly prohibited by the *International Fire Code* and has been a part of the that code since the 2003 edition. Additionally, such a prohibition has typically been banned by jurisdictions for many years prior to that. *Unfortunately, these rules were not being adhered to by property management firms and were not being enforced by the municipality or county.*

Where specifically is the prohibition written?

The currently applicable code is listed under the ***International Fire Code, 2021 Edition Section 308.1.4 Open-Flame Cooking Devices***:

> **308.1.4 Open-flame cooking devices.**
> Charcoal burners and other open-flame cooking devices shall not be operated on combustible balconies or within 10 feet (3048 mm) of combustible construction.
>
> **Exceptions:**
> 1. One- and two-family *dwellings*.

2. Where buildings, balconies and decks are protected by an *automatic sprinkler system*.
3. LP-gas cooking devices having LP-gas container with a water capacity not greater than $2^1/_2$ pounds [nominal 1 pound (0.454 kg) LP-gas capacity].

When does this prohibition take effect?

It has been in effect for over 2 decades in our District. Due to multiple experiences with fires on balconies at multi-family buildings, the District has stepped up compliance and enforcement efforts since Labor Day 2016.

I live in a single family home. Can I have a barbecue grill or gas grill?

Yes. The code does not apply to one and two family dwellings (homes and villas).

I was told that the fire department just passed this rule prohibiting all grills. Is that true?

No. The West County EMS & Fire Protection District, along with thousands of other agencies across the world, have had a long-standing code prohibiting the use of propane grills, gas grills and charcoal grills on combustible porches or within 10 feet of any combustible building. The core prohibition is covered under the *International Fire Code*. In the *2021 Edition*, it is covered under *Section 308.1.4*.

I was told that West County EMS & Fire Protection District will confiscate my grill. Is that true?

No. The enforcement mechanism on the prohibition of certain grills is against the owner or firm that manages any multi-family building where an open flame grill is located on a combustible balcony. The District does not have the authority to confiscate private property, nor should it.

I was told that the West County EMS & Fire Protection District will fine me if they find me using a grill. Is that true?

No. The enforcement mechanism on the prohibition of certain grills is against the owner or firm that manages any multi-family building where an open flame grill is located on a combustible balcony. The District does not fine individuals when a grill is found.

Why are grills prohibited? Isn't barbecuing part of summer?

Cooking fires account for roughly half of the fires nationwide in multi-family buildings (apartments and condominiums) and of those, over one quarter were caused by barbecue grills on the patio or balcony. The improper or careless use of any open-flame cooking device in a multi-family building can have disastrous consequences to multiple families. When fires occur as a result of improper or careless grilling, they typically happen when the grills are left unattended while cooking or when embers from a fire fall down and ignite combustible surfaces sometimes hours after the cooking is done. Unattended fires spread rapidly, placing property and lives in peril.

Why is West County EMS & Fire Protection District inspecting apartment buildings? Isn't there already enough oversight?

Our District was one of the only fire authorities in the metropolitan area that did not inspect multi-tenant buildings. Although the buildings were presumed to have been inspected by the municipality and/or St. Louis County, unfortunately a number of significant fire code violations that affect life safety have been found

and the experience of those has been increasing over the last several years. It is our obligation to ensure that all commercial buildings are safe to occupy, including multi-family apartment buildings. In apartment buildings, occupants typically have limited or no rights to affect changes to life safety matters concerning the building in which they reside. In this respect, the District has the obligation to ensure that life safety measures are code-compliant for the safety to all occupants.

Does the West County EMS & Fire Protection District inspect condominium buildings?

Our District believes that as condominiums are owned by the occupant and managed by an occupant/owner association, owner/residents have sufficient power to control and rectify life safety matters on their property and common areas. As such, District involvement in enforcement of life safety measures would be little different than one- and two-family residences. The District does not get involved with inspections or code enforcement for one- and two-family occupancies and extends this philosophy to also include condominiums.