



PRESS RELEASE

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Sonoma County issues guidelines on temporary tents and canopies for outdoor dining and business operations

SANTA ROSA, CA - In coordination with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, the Sonoma County Fire Chiefs Association and Sonoma County Fire Prevention Officers Association today released guidelines for outdoor dining structures for meeting fire protection requirements and address COVID-19 safety needs.

The guidelines were developed to clarify and supplement the general requirements within the State [Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#) for outdoor dining, bars, pubs, brewpubs, and breweries that are now required to operate outdoors in counties in the most-restrictive purple tier. These guidelines utilize the Statewide Public Health Officer Order of July 13, 2020 which states that “outdoor operations may be conducted under a tent, canopy, or other sun shelter but only as long as no more than one side is closed, allowing sufficient outdoor air movement.”

The guidelines released today provide additional detail concerning partial walls, for example, giving restaurateurs the ability to vary design options for outdoor dining structures. The combined side walls of an outdoor dining structure cannot have less than 50 percent of unobstructed opening to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Only one fully enclosed side wall is allowed.

“We’ve received a number of calls from restaurant owners wanting clarification and flexibility concerning the rules governing these temporary canopies,” said First District Supervisor Susan Gorin, Chair of the Board of Supervisors. “We hope these new guidelines will help address these concerns, while ensuring the safety of the public during this pandemic.”

The new Sonoma County guidance covers a number of other clarifications including:

- Partial walls are now considered to be any vertical obstruction less than 42 inches in height from the ground or floor and not less than 48 inches of clear opening height above the obstruction.
- Tables and chairs in outdoor dining areas must be positioned to ensure 6 feet of distance is provided between patrons at other tables.
- The installation of tent(s) with aggregate space greater than 400 square feet or for the use of 10 or more people requires a permit from the fire code official. These tents are typically restricted to no more than 180 days in a 12-month period under state statutes but, with routine inspections from the local fire code official, are being allowed to remain for longer than 180 days.
- Propane use under tents is typically prohibited by state statute, but limited use of propane following these guidelines is being allowed when approved and permitted by the local fire code official.
- Tents, canopies and membrane structures shall not be installed within 5 feet of buildings unless approved by the fire code official.

To see the complete Draft Guidelines for Temporary Tents, Canopies and Membrane Structures for Outdoor Business Operations go to <http://sonomaedb.org/Business-Assistance/Coronavirus/Industry/>.

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