

TEXARKANA, TEXAS FIRE DEPARTMENT

FIRE CODE INFORMATION SHEET

EMERGENCY ACCESS KEY BOXES

When fire breaks out, seconds count. Yet many times, firefighters find access to an emergency blocked by locked entrance doors or gates. To help reduce delays in providing emergency assistance, the Texarkana Fire Department has adopted a key lock box system. The system adopted by this department is known as the Knox Rapid Entry System.

WHAT IS THE KNOX RAPID ENTRY SYSTEM?

The Knox Rapid Entry System is a secure emergency access program developed for property owners and fire departments. When a fire breaks out, or there is any emergency, the Knox Rapid Entry System allows firefighters immediate entry into buildings and property without forced entry damage or delay.

Property owners store entrance keys, access cards, gate keys, etc., in high-security Knox-Boxes mounted near building entrances. Each Knox-Box purchased by a property owner is keyed to a single master key controlled by the fire department.

In addition to key boxes and vaults, Knox padlocks and key switches operate with the same master key. This allows fire department access to gated communities and storage areas using the same Knox master key.

HOW DOES THE KNOX RAPID ENTRY SYSTEM BENEFIT PROPERTY OWNERS?

When an emergency occurs, the Knox Rapid Entry System will allow the fire department to spend less time and fewer resources gaining access to your building. This faster access will result in a more rapid control of the emergency situation. This could mean faster fire control or more rapid shut-off of a sprinkler system, resulting in less water damage.

In addition, the Knox Rapid Entry System allows fire department access without damage to the building. Without this system, the fire department will gain access by forcible entry. This generally results in damage to doors or windows and their associated facings. After forcible entry, it is generally difficult to secure a building again after the emergency has been controlled. Repairs made after a single forcible entry will likely pay for the purchase and installation of a Knox-Box.

With the Knox Rapid Entry System, property owners save in two ways: first, with more rapid control of emergencies and second, with less damage caused by fire department entry.

WHAT ABOUT MASTER KEY SECURITY?

Obviously, security of the fire department master keys is a major concern. Anyone with access to this key can have access to your building. The Texarkana Fire Department has chosen the Knox Sentralok Master Key Retention system to help insure security of the master keys. Master keys are kept only in emergency apparatus. In each emergency apparatus, the key is secured in a Knox Sentralok master key retention device. The Sentralok device is released only when the appropriate encoded signal is received from the dispatch office. A fire department officer must request that the key be released by way of fire department radio. This transmission is automatically recorded at the dispatch office. After receiving the transmission, the dispatch office sends the appropriate tone to allow release of the key. The officer then completes whatever task is necessary and returns the key to the Sentralok device. He transmits to dispatch that the key has been returned and a key release form is completed and witnessed. This system allows the maximum security available for these master keys.

For more information,
please contact:

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Fire Prevention Division
3124 Texas Blvd. (903) 798-3994
Texarkana, TX 75503 fax (903) 793-4731



Knox Rapid Entry System Questions & Answers

Who is required to install the Knox Rapid Entry System? May other property owners participate in the system?

The Texarkana, City Council adopted ordinance 142-2000 on June 12, 2000. This ordinance requires all commercial buildings constructed after the date of the ordinance to install a key lock box. The same ordinance requires all gated communities, regardless of date of installation, to install the Knox Rapid Entry System. Existing gated communities have six months to comply with the ordinance.

Owners of existing commercial buildings may participate in the system, but are not required to do so. If a property owner chooses to participate in the system, the key lock box and installation must meet all requirements of the ordinance.

Knox also makes boxes designed specifically for residential use. These boxes are keyed to the same fire department master key and are installed in the same manner. Any participation by residential properties, other than gated communities, is strictly voluntary.

Why is the Knox Rapid Entry System required? Don't other companies make similar products?

Other companies do make similar products. However, any system adopted by the fire department must be compatible from one installation to another. Only one master key will be carried on the fire trucks. This key must operate all lock boxes in the city. To maintain master key security, all companies in this business carefully guard the master key codes. They will not release this information to any other manufacturer or supplier. These security concerns require that one supplier be selected for all installations in the city.

The Knox Company was selected for several reasons. Their system has proven reliable in thousands of cities across this nation. They have a variety of products that meet various rapid entry and access needs. However, the primary reason the Knox Company was selected for the Texarkana Fire Department system is key security. No other company makes a product similar to the Knox Sentralok master key retention system. Because we were not willing to settle for a lower level of key security, the Knox Rapid Entry System was chosen.

Does the fire department make any money off sales of the Knox Box?

No. The Fire Department has absolutely no financial interest in the sales of the Knox Company. The only purposes in requiring the key lock system are to improve fire department access in emergency situations and to reduce property damage caused by forcible entry.

How was the key lock box ordinance developed?

The fire department originated the idea. The proposal was presented to a committee who discussed and approved the final version. This committee was composed of persons involved in the building industry and included developers, engineers, and other trades.

How much does a Knox Box cost?

Currently, the least expensive Knox-Box costs less than \$200, plus freight and installation. This box is adequate for most key-only installations. Other products are available. A complete price and product list is available from the Fire Prevention Office. Information is also available at the Knox Company web site at www.knoxbox.com.

Where should my Knox Box be mounted?

Knox Rapid Entry System key boxes should be mounted near the main entry door to your building. Departmental specifications require that the box be mounted within three feet of the main entry at a height of four to six feet. Unusual buildings may allow other mounting standards, at the discretion of the fire official.

How do I lock my building keys in my Knox-Box? I did not receive a key with my box.

Property owners do not receive keys that will open their Knox-Box. Any key that will open your box will also open other boxes in the city. For that reason, only the fire department has the master key. When your box is mounted and ready to install the keys, call the Fire Prevention Division at 798-3994 and advise them that you are ready to put keys in your box. A fire prevention officer will come to your location and assist you with this procedure.

In the past, I have supplied the Fire Department with keys to my building. Will the department still keep the keys?

No. Over the years, the Fire Department has accumulated too many keys. It has become nearly impossible to keep up with individual building or gate keys. If you want the Fire Department to have access to your building, you will have to install a Knox-Box.

What keys need to be installed in my Knox-Box?

The Fire Prevention Division can assist you with that information. Keys required will vary from one business to another. The enabling ordinance lists "a key for each locked point of entry or exit; for each locked mechanical room; for each locked elevator room; for each fire alarm or sprinkler system control room; and for any other areas as directed by the Fire Official."

My building is open 24 hours. Why do I need a key box?

Many times buildings that are always open have storage rooms, fire protection system rooms, or other areas that are locked at times. The personnel on duty may not be allowed access to those rooms. A key box can still save access time and prevent property damage.