

# Deadline Passed, Action Required: Complying with SF's Pillow Test to Avoid Fines and Enhance Safety

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San Francisco, CA – Effective as of July 1, 2023, San Francisco has implemented a vital fire safety regulation known as the Pillow Test, designed to ensure that fire alarms in residential buildings are audible enough to wake residents during emergencies. This mandate is crucial for property managers and owners of multi-unit residential buildings, emphasizing the importance of rigorous fire safety measures that can significantly impact resident safety and emergency outcomes.

## What is the Pillow Test?

The pillow test is a regulatory requirement designed to ensure that the sound levels of fire alarms in residential units are sufficiently loud to awaken individuals from sleep during a fire, providing crucial reaction time. According to the 2022 San Francisco Fire Code (SFFC), fire alarms must reach at least 75 dBA or 15 dB above ambient noise at the pillow level in each sleeping area. These measures are crucial to ensure that all residents, regardless of their sleep phase, receive timely alerts in the event of a fire, thereby maximizing evacuation time and enhancing safety.

## Ensuring Compliance with the Pillow Test

For properties with fire alarm systems installed before January 1, 2017, it is critical to verify that these systems adhere to the audibility requirements of NFPA 72-2013. Systems lacking documentation of previous compliance must undergo an audibility test conducted by a licensed C-10 contractor, with results thoroughly documented and submitted to the San Francisco Fire Department. This testing must take into account any barriers such as doors or curtains to ensure sound levels are maintained.

If the existing system does not meet these standards, upgrading to low-frequency audible appliances, which emit a tone of 520 Hz, may be necessary. These devices have been proven to be more effective in awakening sleeping individuals and are essential for installations requiring updates.

## Steps to Take if You Missed the Compliance Deadline

For property owners or managers who missed the July 1, 2023, deadline for pillow test compliance, there are two critical options to rectify their standing and avoid potential penalties. Option 1 involves conducting a comprehensive audit of the fire alarm system to assess its adherence to NFPA 72-2013 and San Francisco Fire Code Section 1103.7.6.1 specifications. The findings, along with any additional compliance documentation, must then be submitted to the San Francisco Fire Department.

Option 2 is applicable if the initial documentation or audibility standards are not met; in this

case, it is essential to apply for a “\$1.00 Fire Only” permit and arrange for a district fire inspector to verify the system’s compliance through a site inspection. This step is crucial for confirming that the property meets the required safety standards and effectively safeguards the occupants.

#### Urgent Compliance Support Available Through Aura Fire Safety

With the enforcement of the Pillow Test now in effect, immediate action is paramount for properties that have yet to meet the required standards. Property managers and owners are urged to review their current fire alarm systems and ensure they are compliant with San Francisco’s stringent fire safety regulations.

Swiftly addressing any deficiencies not only aligns with legal requirements but also positions the property as a safe and responsible residence. For expert guidance and assistance with compliance evaluations, audibility testing, or system upgrades, Aura Fire Safety stands to provide professional support and ensure that your property conforms to safety efficiently and effectively.

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