

Fire Safety Alert: Idle Wood Pallet Storage on the NIH Bethesda Campus

The following fire safety alert was prepared by the Division of the Fire Marshal, ORS

Idle wood pallets are a common occurrence at the NIH Bethesda Campus. They are usually used to bring in large pieces of equipment or material into buildings by an outside party. However, they are often left in the building once the equipment has been installed. Sometimes they are left with equipment on them and sometimes the pallets are abandoned.

Unfortunately, the pallets are left throughout all buildings on campus including corridors, laboratories, throughout the hospital, etc. These abandoned wood pallets have two very serious fire and life-threatening safety risks:

1. They interfere with egress out of the building.
2. They increase fire risk.

Egress

Corridors are designed to get all occupants safely out of a building. Wood pallets are often left abandoned in hallways. These pallets minimize the width of the corridor, creating a pinch point and a longer egress time.

During an emergency, occupants need to be able to exit the building as soon as possible. By limiting the corridor width, the pallets stored in the corridor interfere with the exit path and increase the time for occupants to exit the building.

Fire Risk

Wood pallets are a combustible product. The dry wood of the pallets can ignite easily, burn rapidly, and cause a lot of damage. Facilities that are meant to store wood pallets are required to have a special sprinkler system designed for the higher hazard. None of the building sprinkler systems on the NIH campus are designed to handle the higher fuel load. In the event of a wood pallet fire at NIH, the sprinkler systems might not be able to handle

the fire and could pose a major threat to occupants and cause major damage to the building.

The pallets must be removed as soon as possible from the buildings to prevent a potentially hazardous situation.

How do I get them removed?

If you see an abandoned pallet, submit a maintenance request to have it removed.

1. Go to the NIH employee intranet at <http://employees.nih.gov/>.
2. Click on maintenance requests under popular links.
3. Click on 'Enter New Service Request.'
4. Sign in to your account.
5. Under the maintenance category tab, click unable to categorize.
6. Under description, write that abandoned wood pallets need to be removed. Provide the exact location in the pull down tabs under the description.
7. Submit the request.

Contact your assigned Facility Manager if you are unable to submit work requests or have further questions about this process.

Whose responsibility is it to get them removed?

You! We are all responsible for keeping NIH safe and prevent potential risks. If you see pallets in the building, tell the proper authorities to ensure their removal.

For further information or assistance regarding this issue, please contact the Division of the Fire Marshal, Office of Research Services at 301-496-0487.