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Why are clearance requirements from dumpsters to commercial buildings important?

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The "dumpster fire" metaphor expresses a chaotic, mismanaged occurrence. For insurance purposes, it can mean a serious loss and claim situation. Fires involving trash and debris are often set by arsonists and account for thousands of fires each year. *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)*

These fires are set in dumpsters, representing a serious hazard to commercial buildings. Dumpsters are often positioned close to the rear of buildings, especially at strip malls and other confined commercial spaces in towns and cities. These fires are dangerous to nearby structures and to firefighters trying to extinguish them. Dumpsters can contain large amounts of wood, cardboard, and plastics. Other discarded items could be lithium-ion batteries, aerosol cans, propane cylinders, or chemical solvents. These may trigger sudden, violent explosions that can endanger firefighters and civilians.

The International Building Code (IBC) and the NFPA address this hazard with clearance specifications. The IBC requires a minimum of 10 feet to a building with a combustible exterior wall. NFPA requires 5 feet. The difference reflects the focus of the codes. IBC is concerned with the building structure safety; the NFPA with escape routes for people egressing out of the building.

Importantly, for buildings with masonry facing walls with no combustible overhangs or openings, there is no clearance requirement.

Both codes require the stated clearances to openings or combustible overhangs or other combustible structures attached to the building.

DISCLAIMER: This information reflects the interpretation of MSO, Inc. with regard to NFPA Standards and Codes and other code sources. It does not represent these codes' official position on the items discussed.



Scene of an arson related dumpster fire.