

Five things New York City property owners should know about boiler maintenance



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Owning a building in New York City means you own a piece of the city's history. But you also own the responsibility of protecting the safety of tenants and local residents along with your investment. When your building uses a boiler as a source of heat, you're operating a potentially dangerous piece of equipment that could cause an explosion, a fire, carbon monoxide leaks or fuel leaks. Even a less extreme malfunction could cause freezing pipes or other damage to your property. The responsibilities of operating a boiler are serious enough that New York City requires annual inspections of certain boilers. Here's what you need to know:

1. Know whether your property falls under the jurisdictional boiler inspection regulations.

Annual inspections during the calendar year are required for all commercial and mixed-use buildings and *any residential building housing six or more families* in all five boroughs. They are also required if your building has large hot water supply boilers or vessels rated at 350,000 BTU/HR or more and if your building contains heating boilers rated at 100,000 BTU/HR or more.

2. Respect the potential dangers of operating a boiler.

In a sealed pressure cooker such as your boiler, the boiling point of water increases as the pressure rises, resulting in superheated water. At a pressure of ~15 psi (pounds per square inch) above the existing atmospheric pressure, water in a pressure cooker can reach a temperature of up to 250 degrees Fahrenheit, depending on altitude. Another basic law of physics to consider with boilers is that when water flashes, or boils violently, to steam, it will always attempt to increase to 1700 times its original volume.

3. Annual servicing and maintenance not only keeps you in compliance, it helps protect your valuable investment.

Be sure to use an experienced, licensed inspector and be aware of what items they should be observing, namely:

- ✓ Low water fuel cutoff operation
- ✓ Safety/relief valve condition and testing
- ✓ Adequacy of combustion and draft air
- ✓ High temperature controls and limits
- ✓ Boiler safety valve operation
- ✓ Safety relief valve leakage
- ✓ Remote shut-off switches
- ✓ Pressure and temperature gauges
- ✓ Boiler room housekeeping
- ✓ Identify combustibles in boiler room
- ✓ Burner control system tests

4. If your building requires a jurisdictional inspection, you must register online and pay the associated boiler operating fees before anyone can report the inspection.

As of August 2017, all jurisdictional boiler inspections are required to be submitted through the Department of Buildings' DOB NOW: Inspections website. The building owner or a representative must create the account and register. Your insurance company or boiler inspector cannot do this for you and cannot perform the inspection until this step is completed. Violations can lead to substantial penalties. For more information go to nyc.gov/buildings.

5. Take advantage of your property insurance company's boiler inspection service if they offer it.

If your insurance company has the experience and expertise to perform boiler inspections and is licensed to do so in New York, there's no reason to pay another boiler inspector for this service. The cost of the inspection may be included in your premium and most likely the insurer will need to inspect the boiler for underwriting purposes anyway. However, you must still register on the DOB website, pay the annual certification fee, provide your insurer with the email link in order for them to report completed instructions, and ensure your insurance company inspector has access to enter the building.



Keeping up with boiler maintenance will help you keep your tenants happy, reduce your chances of a potentially serious situation and help you stay in compliance with local laws. Additional information on inspections can be found on the DOB NOW: Inspections – Public Portal.

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