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## OFFICE OF THE ILLINOIS STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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## NEWS

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**JB Pritzker, Governor**

**Michael D. Kleinik, Director**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### Keeping Things Scary but Safe

#### *Department of Labor and Fire Marshal inspect Halloween's Haunted Houses*

**SPRINGFIELD** – It's that time of year again – scary sounds, darkened corridors, creepy clowns, lots of screaming. Haunted house season is here!

And in Illinois, haunted house attractions need a permit to operate.

“We know people love a scary, good time, but we also want to make sure that spooky night out is safe,” said Michael Kleinik, director of the Illinois Department of Labor.

The Department of Labor, the Illinois State Fire Marshal's office and local agencies all play roles in making sure that the dozens of haunted houses that open their creaky doors in Illinois this time of year follow rules to ensure the safety of their customers.

In IDOL's case, the inspections fall under the Department of Labor's Amusement Ride and Attraction Safety Division. Halloween is the second busy season for IDOL's cadre of inspectors, following in the footsteps of the summer fair season.

All haunted houses in Illinois are required to be inspected prior to operation, though haunted houses operated by not-for-profit religious, educational or charitable organizations can apply for an exemption from IDOL inspection. They still, however, must be inspected by local authorities and/or the State Fire Marshal's office.

The Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal reminds local enforcers and the attraction owners and operators that these structures can be particularly vulnerable to fire and fire injuries if applicable codes are not followed. The rules of the State Fire Marshal's office serve as the minimum requirements that must be met, with local fire and building departments possibly imposing more stringent requirements.

Inspectors follow an elaborate set of rules and regulations to make sure visitors to haunted houses have a scary but safe time. The rules cover everything from emergency exits and lighting to fire extinguishers to proper use of extension cords to flame-retardant materials and training.

A couple of tragic fires in the 1970s and 1980s at haunted houses led to closer scrutiny of their safety. Most haunted houses in Illinois today are required to have smoke detectors and be protected by automatic sprinkler systems.

The State Fire Marshal's office notes these additional restrictions:

- Exits and pathways must be wide enough to account for the maximum number of people in the amusement.
- Limited number of dead-end paths
- Provision of panic hardware on exit doors
- Restrictions on open-flame devices or pyrotechnic special effects
- Furnishings and decorations are required to be flame resistant
- All workers must be trained and prepared for actions to be taken during emergencies.

"The people we deal with generally do a very good job," said Tom Coe, chief ride inspector for IDOL's Amusement Ride and Attraction Safety Division. "They want to maintain a safe environment for their guests."

Besides checking on the safety of the physical facility, the rules also require a criminal background check and sex offender registry check for all non-volunteer operators and a written substance abuse policy that includes random drug testing.

If you determine no permit was issued for a haunted house you visited or need to report an accident or unsafe conditions, you should call the Department of Labor during business hours at 217-782-9347 or after hours at 217-299-5512. You can also submit a complaint online at the department's website at [labor.illinois.gov](http://labor.illinois.gov).