

IMPORTANT



Regulatory Change Announcement

Effective 9/4/2018

(AWNINGS on COMMERCIAL STRUCTURES)

Background:

The building code in Virginia is called the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (VUSBC). USBC includes what was formerly called the Virginia Construction Code (VCC). The USBC is a local code that makes minor changes to the International Building Code (IBC). The IBC is revised every few years and is the basis for the building code for most of the states in the US. Up until very recently, the Virginia Construction Code was based on the IBC code edition dated 2012.

On September 4, 2018 the state of Virginia adopted the IBC code edition dated 2015.

Why is that important?

The 2012 version of the code section 3105.4 Awnings and Canopy Materials stated that "Canopies" were required to meet one of several Flame Spread Standards. This is often but incorrectly referred to as FR or "flame resistant" or "fire retardant". Flame spread refers to how quickly the flame progresses before it self extinguishes. Fabric covers that meet the Flame Spread Standards will burn and are classified as Combustible.

What has changed?

The 2015 version of the code section 3105.4 Awnings and Canopy Materials states that "Awnings and Canopies" are required to meet one of Flame Spread Standards listed in the code. This change is significant because it means that new construction for ALL awnings on commercial structures must meet the Flame Spread Requirements. That includes new complete awnings AND recovers of existing frames.

There is one exception: according to the 2015 Code, "The fire propagation performance and flame spread index requirements shall not apply to awnings installed on detached one and two family dwellings.

What Does this mean in practical terms?

The most popular awning fabric is Sunbrella®. Sunbrella® DOES NOT MEET ANY OF THE FLAME SPREAD REQUIREMENTS. That means that Sunbrella® cannot be used on commercial projects. Is the change retroactive? NO, any installation of Sunbrella® that met the 2012 standard when it was installed is still in compliance.

Capitol Awning

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Can Sunbrella® be treated to meet the standard?

There is one company that claims it can treat Sunbrella® to make it pass the Flame Spread Standards. However, its's claims have not been verified by outside laboratories, the coating will wear off over time, application of a coating will void the Sunbrella® 10 year Warranty, the companies certification states that treated fabric will meet standards when it ships but specifically excludes compliance when the fabric is handled by a fabricator or end user, and finally, several jurisdictions in Virginia will not accept any post manufacturing treatments. Because of these reasons, Capitol Awning™ does not use treated Sunbrella®.

Who is going to catch me?

Code Officials are very aware of the new Code requirement because most have received training on 2015 Code changes. We have already seen the results of this new emphasis on the change by Plan Reviewers, Building Inspectors, and Fire Marshalls in multiple jurisdictions enforcing the new Code provisions.

What are My Alternatives?

There are 3 types of fabric that meet the new flame spread requirements for commercial structures: Acrylic/Polyester Blends, Laminated Vinyls, and Coated Vinyls. Determining a fabric type is a function of budget, aesthetics, code requirements, designed use, and color.

Capitol Awning will be happy to consult with you on the requirements of your project to suggest the right fabric for your application. A summary of characteristics for each type of fabric is included below.

Summary of Characteristics By Fabric Type

FABRIC TYPES	Flame Spread Code Approved	Water-Proof	Cold Cracking	OK for Free Hang Valance?	Easy to Clean	Price Trends	Typical Warranty	Common Brands
Acrylics	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	\$	10 yrs	Sunbrella, Tempotest, Dickson
Acrylic / Polyester Blends	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	\$\$	5 yrs	Firesist, Weathermax FR
Laminated Vinyls	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	\$\$-\$\$\$	5-10 yrs	Coastline Plus, Natura, Weather-Chek,
Coated Vinyls	YES	YES	Partial	NO	YES	\$\$\$	8-10 yrs	Ferrari Vivo, Ferrari 502v2, Weather Tyte

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