

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
CITY OF BALTIMORE



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

Investigative
Report Synopsis

OIG Case # 26-0022-I

Issued: June 4, 2026



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
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City Hall, Suite 635
100 N. Holliday Street
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June 4, 2026

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to independently promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to independently investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse. The following synopsis is a condensed version of the full report provided to City management officials and does not contain all investigative information.

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) received a complaint regarding unsafe work conditions at a Department of Transportation (DOT) facility (DOT Facility).

The OIG conducted a site visit at the DOT Facility. Upon entering the building, the OIG observed a sign advising the DOT Facility was under a fire watch per the Baltimore Fire Department (BCFD). The watch was due to the buildings sprinkler and fire alarm systems being inoperable. The OIG learned that the building has been under a Level II fire watch since 2024 after an inspection conducted by the Office of the Fire Marshall. A Level II fire watch entails hourly walkthroughs of the building by assigned personnel with daily reports to BCFD on the building's status.

Background

The DOT Facility houses signs and markings, special events, and facility maintenance divisions. The majority of workers assigned to the facility are laborers, carpenters, or other maintenance employees. These employees stated their job duties involve repairing and/or replacing the City's street signs, fabricating street signs, and marking the City's streets and crosswalks. Many of the employees at the facility are in and out of the building throughout their shift, however, several spend their entire shift within the building.

An [October 2021 City Audit](#) of the BCFD's fire watch program, defined a fire watch as "a temporary measure intended to ensure continuous and systematic surveillance of a building or portion thereof by one or more qualified individuals for the purposes of identifying and controlling fire hazards, detecting early signs of unwanted fire, raising an alarm of fire, and notifying the fire department." Figure 1 shows the Audit's Level II definition:

Figure 1: Fire watch levels in Audit

The BCFD – OFM is responsible for instituting a Fire Watch Program as required by IFC, § 202 and §109.4.1. A fire watch is categorized as one of the following levels:

- **Level I** - Instituted when there is a failure in one or more fire protection systems where there is no large influx of people or employees occupying the area. Continuous monitoring is delegated to the business management to perform a fire watch until the fire protection system is serviced or fixed. The fire watch usually lasts a day or two days. This service is done during regular hours; therefore, the BCFD does not charge fees.
- **Level II** - Level II has the same process as Level I, the difference between the two levels is the size and use of the building (e.g. warehouse, building office, mall, etc.). Also, the fire watch is handled by the maintenance staff who can direct the fire department and has knowledge of the fire protection systems of the building (e.g. emergency exits, fire alarms, automatic, sprinklers).

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE

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This public synopsis is only a summary of a more comprehensive report of investigation submitted to the appropriate City management official

Site Visit DOT Signs and Markings Facility

The OIG conducted a site visit to the DOT facility on February 17, 2026. Affixed to the entrance door was a fire watch sign noting that the facility does not have working sprinklers or alarm system (Figures 2&3). When the OIG asked DOT personnel about the fire watch they stated the building has been like this for years.

Figures 2&3: Front door of DOT Facility and fire watch sign from February 17, 2026, OIG site visit



The OIG learned the facility has been under a fire watch stemming from a BCFD inspection in 2024. The OIG learned that the inspection was conducted by BCFD in October 2024 and was placed on a Level II fire watch. According to another fire inspection from July 14, 2025, the sprinkler system was last serviced in 2019, the alarm panel was not operating and was again noted to be on a Level II fire watch.

After the site visit and becoming aware of the fire watch, the OIG obtained the original BCFD report that documented the initial violations of International Fire Code (IFC) including an expired extinguisher (Figure 4) and alarm system malfunction (Figure 5). The photos depicted an extinguisher that was last checked in 2019 and was expired by three years at the time of BCFD’s inspection. The alarm control pad indicated “trouble” on the screen and was lit up next to the word trouble in a user notification.

Figures 4 & 5: Expired (2019) fire extinguisher and fire alarm system control pad from 2024 BCFD inspection



The OIG found in the BCFD entry that many of the issues have persisted since 2019. Upon speaking with BCFD personnel, the OIG learned that these issues were not known until the 2024 inspection which forced BCFD to put

the building under a Level II fire watch.

Many of the noted issues found and documented by BCFD during the initial inspection were still present at the time of the OIG's site visit. The OIG observed the fire watch notice and saw a stuck facility door and the sprinkler system had insulation covering it in a section (Figures 6&7).

Figure 6 & 7: Stuck open bay door & insulation covering sprinkler system from February 17, 2026 OIG site visit



The OIG was shown a bay where one of the road marking trucks is kept. The vehicle is not able to fit into the bay completely due to its size and thus the door is unsecured (Figure 8). Due to the truck not being able to fit fully and the bay door having to be left open the temperature in the facility is approximately 10° warmer than the outside temperature at any given time. On the day of the visit, the OIG measured the room temperature at 46° Fahrenheit while the outside temperature was 37° Fahrenheit (Figure 9).

Figure 8: OIG site visit - truck that is too tall for garage bay door

Figure 9: OIG site visit - Inside temperature of work area



Findings from February 17th Site Visit

The OIG found the DOT Facility is still under a Level II fire watch and has a posted sign alerting individuals that the sprinkler and fire alarm systems are not working. The building was placed under a fire watch in 2024; however, some of the issues appear to date back as far as 2019, approximately seven years ago. The OIG observed insulation that is covering a portion of the sprinkler system and issues with bay doors that affect temperature control but also could be a security risk. The lack of a working sprinkler system may be a potential Occupational Safety and Health Administration violation.¹

The OIG recommended that DOT work with BCFD and the Department of General Services to fix these issues, especially since the facility has flammable items, including lumber, inside. Without a working sprinkler and alarm system, these conditions present a direct hazard to workers and City property.

Management Response

DOT responded on March 30, 2026, that the fire safety issues found are valid and while the fire watch walkthroughs had been done, they had not been done hourly as required. DOT stated they obtained the services of a vendor (Vendor) and the repairs were expected to begin within a week and estimated to be completed in 120 days. DOT's response is available on the OIG website alongside this report.

Follow-up Site Visit – June 2nd

The OIG confirmed DOT obtained a contractor's services with a purchase order for approximately \$166,000.

The OIG conducted another site visit on June 2, 2026 (approximately 64 days since DOT response). The OIG observed the out of service sign still posted on the door to the DOT Facility (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Out of service sign



The OIG noted the addition of an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) in one of the main corridors (Figure 11). The addition of a compressor installed to the sprinkler line was observed (Figure 12) and fire extinguishers in the building were all serviced in September 2025 (Figure 13).

¹ [OSHA 1910, Occupational Safety and Health Standards](#)

Figure 11: AED installed



Figure 12: Compressor attached to sprinkler system



Figure 13: Fire Extinguisher Serviced Sept. 2025

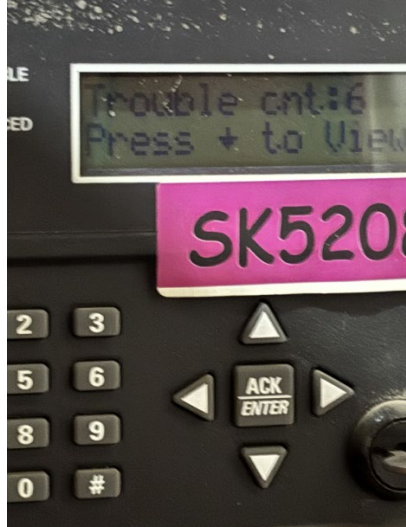


The fire watch sign was still posted on the door, and the fire alarm system was displaying a “trouble” indicator and audibly making a high-pitched beeping sound approximately every 2-3 seconds (Figures 14-15). The OIG included a video of the high-pitched beeping as an exhibit to this report (Exhibit 1).

Figure 14: Trouble codes on fire alarm system

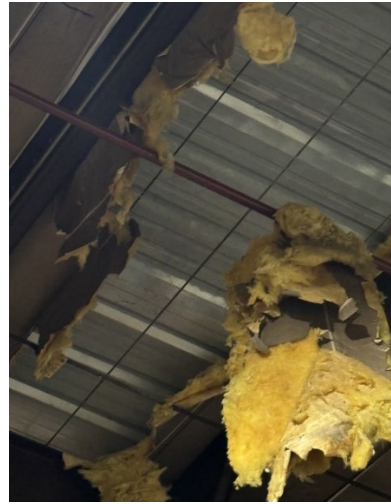


Figure 15: Trouble codes on fire alarm system



The OIG also noted insulation is still hanging and wrapped around the sprinkler system from the roof (Figures 16&17).

Figures 16&17: Hanging insulation



Employees confirmed that hourly checks on the building are being conducted in accordance with the Level II fire watch. The OIG was informed that the truck that did not fit through the bay door (Figure 8) had been modified and now fits in the building. During the site visit, a witness stated the front bay door (Figure 6) still does not close. Witnesses stated that, in their opinion, minimal changes have occurred since the OIG's February 2026 site visit.

The OIG notes DOT's progress with quickly obtaining a contractor and observed fire extinguishers and a compressor installed to the sprinkler system. The OIG understands the repairs are expected to take 120 days. However, serious safety concerns remain regarding the inoperable fire alarm system, hanging insulation, and potential bay door issues, especially since employees are currently working inside the building.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Isabel Mercedes Cumming".

Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City
Hon. Zeke Cohen, Baltimore City Council President
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council
Hon. Ebony Thompson, Baltimore City Solicitor

Exhibit

1. Video of fire alarm beeping