

Building Exits

Maintaining your Exits

Having clear and accessible exits is a critical component in maintaining occupant safety in your building. Fire inspectors take special notice of exits during fire inspections. At times of emergency if all other safety systems fail, making sure someone can get out of a building is of paramount concern. It is your job as a business owner to constantly monitor your buildings exit ways to make sure they are clear of clutter.

An exit is comprised of three different components. **Exit access** refers to the pathways a person must travel to make it to the building exit. Many buildings have exits to the rear of the building and people are led to these exits often by use of exit signs. "The back" of the building is often off limits to customers as this is where employees perform work or offices exist. Expect your customers to be unfamiliar with this territory. Because they are unfamiliar, you must maintain a clear pathway to all exits; an exit pathway must be at least 36" wide. Often, business store boxes bin or general storage in "the back," the back being somewhere behind the business where customers don't see the storage. Often, due to lack of proper arrangement in "the back," pathways narrow. The fire department understands, storage comes at a premium but maintaining proper exits are a primary concern for fire inspectors. If an exit is deemed unacceptable, it will be necessary to make clearing the exit your highest priority.



The second part of an exit is the **exit** itself, or the door one must open to actually get out of the building. Check your doors, if you find them “sticky” or “stiff,” they need to be repaired to make sure they open free and clear. A fire inspector will check doors during times of inspection to make sure excessive force isn’t needed to open the door (watch for ice in the winter freezing doors or snow build-up preventing the door from completely opening). Remember, during business hours, only one single-action lock may be engaged. This means if you have multiple ways of locking the door, only one lever-lock may be engaged during business hours. It is recommended that during business hours, no lock is engaged. Chains and dial locks are not permitted at any time. Unless you have an older building with a “grandfathered” door, all new doors installed intended to be an exit must open outward. If you are installing a new exterior door, seriously consider panic hardware for safety purposes.

The third portion of an exit is the **exit discharge**. An occupant must have an option to get out and away from the building. Inspectors view all sides of the building during inspection, checking the exit discharge is an item inspectors confirm during their “walk around.” At times, pallet storage or even boxes tend to be piled and create a “cage” around the door. At times, snow build-up creates a blockage. Simply getting out of the building isn’t sufficient if the person cannot quickly and safely find themselves in a safe area out and away from the building. Keep the outside rear of your building organized to prevent occupants attempting to exit in an emergency in a maze of pallets, boxes or materials.



Fire exit blocked, again! North west side of Clark Hall
November 09, 2006, 10:00am