

Are Your Emergency Exits Clear?

Everyone knows that in the event of a fire you do not use the elevator. Rather people are instructed to use the fire emergency exits and stairwells. Everyone assumes these fire exits will provide a clear and unobstructed path of exit to safety. Is this the case in all of your facilities?

No matter how much storage space we have, we always seem to need more. Emergency exits are not the area to find that extra storage space. The Fire Code requires all building owners to maintain clear travel at emergency exits and access to exits.

You owe a duty of care to your employees and visitors. When an emergency occurs, your first order of safety is early warning. Your second order of safety is evacuation. If the exits or access to the exits is blocked, every building occupant is in harm's way during an emergency evacuation. Storage of any kind should not be allowed in aisles, passageways, stairwells or vestibules that form part of the exits. During an emergency there will be no time to remove the stored items.

Don't forget about the outside of your building. Clutter around your building perimeter should be removed. In the winter snow and ice should be removed as soon as practicable and surfaces should be free of trip hazards and maintained in good condition. The area should be well lit at night. If your premise is fenced, make sure the fenced area has a means of escape, preferably at each exit door location. You don't want evacuees trapped inside the fencing next to a burning building.

Parking spaces located in front of emergency exits should be eliminated and the area clearly marked "No Parking". Emergency doors should not be locked, chained or otherwise tampered with to impede safe exiting. Utilize panic hardware on an exit door which allows the door to be locked from the exterior while still allowing an unimpeded exit from inside the building. Establish a procedure for a weekly testing of all panic hardware located on doors forming part of a required exit. Make sure staff know that these exits can never be chained closed when there are occupants in the building. Document all of your inspections and maintenance activities.

All exit signs should be installed showing the direction of egress. They must be illuminated and visible when the building is occupied. They should be connected to a back-up battery system. Never use paper exit signs.

There is an endless array of storage options available. Emergency exits are not among the options.

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