

MEANS OF EGRESS

Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center, Environmental Health and Safety Department

INTRODUCTION

The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) (OSHA) Standard is a guide for ensuring that people have a safe and efficient means of leaving a building or facility under emergency circumstances, and they will have minimal problems finding and using the exit.

Below you will learn general requirements imposed by 29 CFR 1910 for providing means of egress from buildings. This is described as follows:

- General requirements fundamental to safe and efficient egress from facilities
- Detailed requirements to ensure that the qualitative and quantitative factors are properly covered
- Brief descriptions on the requirements for exit markings and signs.

Emphasis will appear to be on escaping from fires. Other factors beside the actual hazard can compound the danger associated with an emergency situation. Some examples are listed here:

- Panic and confusion
- Poor visibility
- Lack of information or misinformation.

The impact of these factors depends on the danger present, the people involved, the characteristics of the building, and the quality of the means of egress provided.

These compounding factors frequently cause more injuries and fatalities than the hazard itself. Providing the proper means of egress can enable people to successfully escape from the primary hazard.

FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

Fundamental requirements apply to all buildings intended for human occupancy.

- There shall be exits sufficient for prompt and convenient escape in an emergency.
- Design of exits and other safeguards should not depend solely on any single safeguard to protect life.
- Building structures shall not cause danger to occupants during the period necessary for escape.
- There shall be no locks or devices to prevent emergency egress except in specialized facilities that have an attendant on-duty, such as mental, penal, or corrective institutions.
- Means of egress shall be clearly visible and understandable to physically and mentally capable occupants.
- Any doorway or passageway not constituting an exit or way to reach an exit, but could be confused as such, shall be clearly marked "Not an Exit."
- Adequate and reliable illumination shall be provided for all exit facilities in every building.
- When a fire may not provide adequate warning, fire alarm facilities shall be provided, where necessary, to warn occupants of the existence of fire.

Provisions for emergency egress shall not create hazards under normal occupancy conditions.

ACCESS TO EXITS

The basic requirements for exit access include the following:

- Exits must be readily accessible at all times
- Doors from a room to an exit or a way of exit access shall be of the side-hinged, swinging type and must swing with exit travel when the room is occupied by more than 50 persons or used for a high hazard occupancy
- Access to an exit shall not be through a bathroom or other room subject to locking, except where the exit serves only that room
- Access to exits shall be clearly recognizable
- Exit doors shall not be disguised, covered, concealed, or decorated in such a way as to confuse their purpose
- Mirrors must not be placed on or near exit doors
- Routes of exit access shall never be toward a high hazard location, unless effectively shielded
- Minimum width of any way of exit access is 28 inches.

EXAMPLES

Example of Obstructed Egress



Pretty hard to get out when your egress is obstructed.

Example of Exit Door Disguised



Exit doors cannot be disguised with paint or decorations like this one above.