

Information Bulletin

NUMBER 35

Emergency Lighting

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) publishes the Life Safety Code® to establish minimum standards for protecting occupants of various types of businesses and operations. Local jurisdictions may or may not follow these standards and you should consult your local ordinances on this subject.

One important area covered by the Code is emergency lighting, an essential element in aiding emergency egress from an occupancy. Emergency lighting is critical when the power fails and building evacuation is needed.

Installation, Testing and Recordkeeping

Emergency lighting is required to illuminate the entire path of a means of egress¹ for a minimum of 1-½ hours and it should activate within 10 seconds of the failure of the primary power source, i.e. public utility company or interruption of the power from the circuit board. The power source for emergency lighting can either be rechargeable batteries or emergency generators.

Testing of required emergency lighting systems shall be conducted at 30-day intervals for not less than 30 seconds. An annual test for not less than 1 ½ hours is also required. Written records of visual inspections and tests must be kept by the owner for inspection by the authority having jurisdiction.

Emergency Lighting Requirements by Occupancy

Specific occupancy classes require emergency lighting. Among these are apartments, mercantile operations, business operations, places of assembly and industrial plants based on the following criteria:

New and Existing Mercantile²: Mercantile occupancies with more than 3000 square feet and mall buildings shall have emergency lighting facilities.

New and Existing³ Apartments: Emergency lighting shall be provided in all buildings with more than 12 dwelling units or more than three stories in height, unless every dwelling unit has a direct exit to the outside of the building at grade level.

New Business: Emergency lighting shall be provided in any building where any one of the following conditions exists:

1. The building is two or more stories in height above the level of exit discharge, i.e. grade level public way.
2. The occupancy is subject to 50 or more occupants above or below the level of exit discharge.
3. The occupancy is subject to 300 or more total occupants.

Existing Business: Emergency lighting shall be provided in any building where any one of the following conditions exists:

1. The building is two or more stories in height above the level of exit discharge.
2. The occupancy is subject to 100 or more occupants above or below the level of exit discharge.
3. The occupancy is subject to 1000 or more total occupants.

New Places of Assembly: Emergency lighting shall be required in an occupancy (1) used for a gathering of 50 or more persons for deliberation, worship, entertainment, eating, drinking, amusement, awaiting transportation, or similar uses; or (2) used as a special amusement building, regardless of occupant load. Private party tents less than 1200 square feet in area shall not be required to have emergency lighting.

Existing Places of Assembly: Emergency lighting shall be required in an occupancy (1) used for a gathering of 50 or more persons for deliberation, worship, entertainment eating, drinking, amusement, awaiting transportation, or similar uses; or (2) used as a special amusement building, regardless of occupant load. Churches with less than 300 occupants and private party tents less than 1200 square feet in area shall not be required to have emergency lighting.

Industrial: Emergency lighting shall be required except in (1) Special purpose industrial occupancies without routine human habitation or (2) Structures occupied only during daylight hours, with skylights or windows arranged to provide the required level of illumination on all portions of the means of egress during such hours.

¹ A means of egress is defined as a continuous and unobstructed way of travel from any point in a building or structure to a public way consisting of three separate and distinct parts: (1) the exit access, (2) the exit, and (3) the exit discharge

² Mercantile is defined as an occupancy used for the display and sale of merchandise.

³ Existing is that which is already in existence on the date this edition of the Code goes into effect.

Summary

In review, emergency lighting aids egress from buildings in the event of fire, power failures or emergency situations. Powered by rechargeable batteries or emergency generators, the lights must remain on for at least 1-½ hours and must be tested on a regular basis. Specific occupancy types dictate the use of emergency lighting.

This bulletin is intended only as a reminder and is offered solely as a guide to assist management in its responsibility of providing a safer working environment. This bulletin is not intended to cover all possible hazardous conditions or unsafe acts that may exist. Other unsafe acts or hazardous conditions should also be noted and corrective action taken.

Source: NFPA 101® Life Safety Code® 2003 Edition