

# Information Bulletin

NUMBER 39

## Emergency Exits - *Restaurants*

Everyday, many of us enjoy the ease and camaraderie of eating a meal in a restaurant. However, few of us think about what might happen in the event the restaurant experiences a power outage, fire or similar emergency and there is a need to quickly evacuate. Your first line of defense is to know where the emergency exit is located and being able to reach the outside.

As a restaurant owner, your responsibility is to provide clear paths and recognizable and appropriate exits for your customers to leave in the event of an emergency.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) publishes the Life Safety Code® for the purpose of providing minimum requirements for the design, operation, and maintenance of buildings for safety to life from fire. An important area covered by the Code is emergency exits, an essential element in aiding emergency egress from a building. Emergency exits or "means of egress" are critical when the need arises to quickly evacuate people from a building.

### Definition of a Means of Egress

A means of egress is made up of three components:

- The "exit access" is that portion of a means of egress that leads to an exit.
- The actual "exit" is that portion of a means of egress that is separated from all other spaces of a building or structure by construction or equipment as required to provide a protected way of travel to the exit discharge.
- The "exit discharge" is that portion of a means of egress between the termination of an exit and a public way.

The Code recognizes and addresses different arrangements for emergency exits based on the building occupancy. For

the purpose of this bulletin, only those requirements for restaurants will be provided.

### Restaurants

Restaurants are considered either an "assembly" or a "mercantile" occupancy. The determining factor is the maximum number of persons that can be accommodated at any one time. This is known as the "occupant load". If 50 or more persons, it is an assembly occupancy. If less than 50 persons, it is a mercantile occupancy.

### Restaurants - *Assembly Occupancy*

At a minimum, there must be two designated emergency exits. The main entrance can be counted as one of the exits. Exits need to be arranged so that the total length of travel from any point to reach an exit does not exceed 200 feet. This distance can be extended to 250 feet if the risk is fully protected by an automatic sprinkler system. When there are only two exits, the second exit must be located as far apart as practicable and as far from the main entrance/exit as practicable within the travel distance guidelines. Additional exits will be required as the occupant load increases or if there is more than one level for assembly purposes.

Means of egress through the kitchen, storerooms, restrooms, closets or hazardous areas is not permitted. The width of any exit access corridor serving 50 or more persons must not be less than 44 in.

The number of fixed seats for fixed seating restaurants determines the occupant load. The minimum exit width is determined by taking one half the occupancy load times 0.2" per occupant. If the result is less than 32 inches then the minimum exit door clear width of 32 inches must be used for each exit. If the result is greater than 32 inches, then the actual results must be used for the exit door clear width.

Exit doors should swing in the direction of exit egress.

Exit door width shall not be less than 32 inches in clear width, i.e. the narrowest point in the door opening, or of a width to accommodate one-half\* of the total occupant load whichever is greater.

Aisle width is another important consideration for emergency exits. When serving fixed seating, aisle width shall not be less than 44 inches. This allows for access to egress routes without undue hindrance. Do not allow storage or temporary seating in exit corridors that will impede egress.

### **Restaurants - Mercantile Occupancy**

As defined earlier, this classification refers to restaurants serving occupant loads of less than 50 persons. Designated as a Class C mercantile occupancy, the area does not exceed 3000 sq. ft of gross area and occupies only one story, excluding mezzanines.

A single means of egress is permitted provided that the travel distance to the exit or to a mall does not exceed 75 ft. This may be extended to 100 ft. if the entire occupancy is protected by an automatic sprinkler system.

Exit door clear width is the same requirement as for an assembly occupancy; 32 inches of clear width. Occupant load, though, is based on one of four factors depending on the individual use of the occupancy.

- Concentrated use without fixed seating, use 7 sq. ft /person.
- Less concentrated use without fixed seating, use 15 sq. ft. /person.
- Bench type seating, use 18 linear inches/person.
- Fixed seating, use total number of fixed seats.

Aisle width serving seating at tables must not be less than 36 inches when serving an occupant load of 50 or fewer.

Exit access is allowed to pass through a storeroom, provided that the following conditions are met:

- (1) Not more than 50 percent of exit access shall be provided through the storeroom.
- (2) The storeroom must not be subject to locking.
- (3) The main aisle through the storeroom must not be less than 44 in. wide.
- (4) The path of travel through the storeroom, defined with fixed barriers, shall be direct and continuously maintained in an unobstructed condition.

### **Additional Considerations for All Restaurants**

To ensure that exits are easily identifiable and can be quickly located and opened, appropriate exit marking, illumination, emergency lighting and locking mechanism is required in most cases.

Exits, other than the main exterior exit doors that are obviously and clearly identifiable as exits shall be marked by an approved sign that is readily visible from any direction of exit access. Access paths to exits where the exit or way to reach the exit is not readily apparent shall be marked by approved, readily visible signs.

Emergency lighting is required except for the Class C mercantile occupancy.

Exit doors, other than the main entrance, are to be equipped with panic hardware or fire exit hardware.

**DO NOT PADLOCK OR CHAIN DESIGNATED EXIT DOORS!**

### **Summary**

In review, emergency exits aid egress from buildings in the event of fire, power failures or emergency situations. The requirements to have a way to an exit, an exit and an exit discharge based on the occupant load, allows swift and safe passage out of the occupancy in the event of an emergency. Since a local Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) may elect to impose more strict requirements, we suggest you check with your AHJ to determine the requirements in your area.

\* The main entrance/exit shall be of a width that accommodates two-thirds of the total occupant load in the following assembly occupancies: bars with live entertainment, dance halls, discotheques, nightclubs, festival seating

**Source:** NFPA 101® Life Safety Code® 2003 Edition

*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.*