

How would you escape from your workplace during an emergency? Do you know where all the exits are in case your first choice is too crowded or blocked? Are you sure the doors will be unlocked and that the exit access behind them won't be blocked during a fire, explosion, or other crisis? Knowing the answers to these questions could keep you safe during an emergency.

Workplace Exit Routes

Usually, a workplace must have at least two exit routes for prompt evacuation. But more than two exits are required if the number of employees, size of the building, or arrangement of the workplace won't allow for safe evacuation. Exit routes must be located as far away as practical from each other in case one is blocked by fire or smoke.

Requirements for Exits

Exits must be separated from the workplace by fire-resistant materials—that is, a one-hour fire-resistance rating if the exit connects three or fewer stories and a two-hour fire-resistance rating if the exit connects more than three floors.

Exits can have only those openings necessary to allow access to the exit from occupied areas of the workplace or to the exit discharge. Openings must be protected by a self-closing, approved fire door that remains closed or automatically closes in an emergency. Additionally, "EXIT" signs with plainly legible letters should be installed and the line-of-sight to the signs should always be clearly visible.

Safety Features for Exit Routes:

- Keep exit routes free of explosives or highly flammable furnishings and other decorations.
- Arrange exit routes so employees won't have to travel toward a high-hazard area unless the path of travel is effectively shielded from the high-hazard area.
- Ensure exit routes are free and unobstructed by materials, equipment, locked doors, or dead-end corridors.
- Provide adequate lighting for exit routes for employees with normal vision.
- Keep exit route doors free of decorations or signs that obscure their visibility.
- Post signs along the exit access indicating the direction of travel to the nearest exit and exit discharge if that direction isn't immediately apparent.
- Mark doors or passages along an exit access that could be mistaken for an exit "Not an Exit" or with a sign identifying its use, such as "Closet."
- Renew fire-retardant paints or solutions when needed.
- Maintain exit routes during construction, repairs, or alterations.

Design and Construction Requirements:

- Exit routes must be permanent parts of the workplace.
- Exit discharges must lead directly outside or to a street, walkway, refuge area, public way, or open space with access to the outside.
- Exit discharge areas must be large enough to accommodate people likely to use the exit route.
- Exit route doors must unlock from the inside. They must be free of devices or alarms that could restrict use of the exit route if the device or alarm fails.
- Exit routes can be connected to rooms only by side-hinged doors, which must swing out in the direction of travel if the room may be occupied by more than 50 people.
- Exit routes must support the maximum permitted occupant load for each floor served, and the capacity of an exit route may not decrease in the direction of exit route travel to the exit discharge.
- Exit routes must have ceilings at least seven and a half feet high.
- An exit access must be at least 28 inches wide at all points. Objects that project into the exit must not reduce its width.

*Source material taken from www.osha.gov.