

An emergency exit in a structure is a special exit for emergencies such as a fire. The combined use of regular and special exits allows faster evacuation, while it also provides an alternative if the route to the regular exit is blocked by fire, smoke.

Overview

An exit route is a continuous and unobstructed path of exit travel from any point within a workplace to a place of safety. An exit route consists of three parts:

- Exit access – portion of an exit route that leads to an exit.
- Exit – portion of an exit route that is generally separated from other areas to provide a protected way of travel to the exit discharge.
- Exit discharge – part of the exit route that leads directly outside or to a street, walkway, refuge area, public way, or open space with access to the outside.

As per OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Organization, USA), a workplace must have at least two exit routes to permit prompt evacuation of employees and other building occupants during an emergency. However, a single exit route is permitted where the number of employees, the size of the building, its occupancy, or the arrangement of the workplace is such that all employees would be able to evacuate safely during an emergency.

Exit routes must be located as far away as possible from each other in case one is blocked by fire or smoke.



Case Studies

Five employees were killed after a fire broke out in an office at Ghaziabad in May 2016

- Five employees were killed, four other employees sustained injuries while trying to escape from the building.
- The main gate of the office had been closed. The entire staircase was filled with smoke and employees could not go downstairs because of the fire. An iron gate leading to the terrace was also locked.
- One of the employees lost his balance while jumping from the window. He fell and hit his head on the ground.

Thirteen persons were killed after a major fire broke out in a garments factory in November 2016

- There were 16 workers inside the factory at the time of the incident and exit was blocked.
- Thirteen persons died while three others had a miraculous escape after they jumped from the roof.

CBI investigations found a number of fire code violations in the infamous Uphaar Cinema fire of 1997.



- No emergency lights, foot lights, exit lights (hall was in pitch darkness)
- Blocked gangways (the hall had made unauthorized extensions and additions to seats)
- Blocked exits (many exit doors – including the one leading to the terrace – and gates were locked)
- Unauthorised use of premises (shops were being run from spaces supposed to be empty)

Generic features for exit routes

- Keep exit routes free of explosive or highly flammable furnishings and other decorations.
- Ensure that exit routes are unobstructed at all times.
- Arrange exit routes so employees will not have to travel toward a high-hazard area, unless required.
- Ensure that safeguards designed to protect employees during an emergency remain in working order.
- Provide lighting for exit routes adequate for employees with normal vision.
- Keep exit route doors free of decorations or signs.
- Post signs along the exit access indicating the direction of travel to the nearest exit and exit.
- Mark doors or passages along an exit access that could be mistaken for an exit "Not an Exit".
- Install "EXIT" signs in plainly legible letters.
- Renew fire-retardant paints or solutions often enough to maintain their fire-retardant properties.
- Maintain exit routes during construction, repairs, or alterations.
- Provide an emergency alarm system to alert employees.

Corridors and Passageways

- Exit corridors and passageways should be of width greater than the aggregate required width of exit doorways leading from them in the direction of travel to the exterior.
- Where stairways discharge, the height of corridors and passageways should be not less than 2.4 m.
- All means of exit, including staircases, lifts lobbies and corridors, should be adequately ventilated.



Internal Staircases

- Internal stairs should be constructed of noncombustible materials throughout.
- Internal stairs should have an external wall of the building constituting at least one of its sides and be completely enclosed.
- A staircase should not be arranged round a lift shaft.
- Hollow combustible construction should not be permitted.
- No gas piping, or electrical panels should be allowed in the stairway.



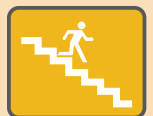
Door ways

- Every exit doorway should open into an enclosed stairway or a horizontal exit of a corridor or passageway.
- Exit doorways should open outwards, that is, away from the room, but should not obstruct the travel.
- Exit door should not open immediately upon a flight of stairs.
- Mirrors should not be placed in exit doors to avoid confusion regarding the direction of exit.



External Stairs

- External stairs should always be kept in sound operable conditions.
- All external stairs should be directly connected to the ground.
- Entrance to the external stairs should be separate and remote from the internal staircase.
- Care should be taken to ensure that no wall opening or window opens on to or close to an external stairs.
- The route to the external stairs should be free of obstructions at all times.
- The external stairs should be constructed of noncombustible materials.
- No external staircase, should be inclined at an angle greater than 45° from the horizontal.



Trivia

Pressurization is a method adopted for protected escape routes against ingress of smoke, especially in high-rise buildings. Air is injected into the staircases, lobbies or corridors, to raise their pressure in adjacent parts of the building. As a result, ingress of smoke or toxic gases into the escape routes will be prevented.

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