



Office of Compliance Safety and Health ***FAST FACTS***

Exit Signage

When there is a fire emergency in a building, all occupants must be notified of the most efficient way to exit. Unless a person is very familiar with a building's layout, he or she will immediately look for the familiar "Exit" signs, which are present in all public buildings and point to safety. All occupied structures must have approved Exit signs; all Exit signs must be visible from any direction.



Figure 1: Improper handwritten Exit sign

In the 109th Congress Biennial Inspections in 2005, the Office of Compliance found seven instances of an illuminated Exit sign with a light out and 49 instances of improper or lacking signage in the Capitol complex. These problems can lead to danger when people need proper emergency information in order to exit a building as quickly as possible. It is important that the correct signs be present to convey this information most effectively.

EXIT SIGN VISIBILITY

Because of minimum required levels of visibility, handwritten and unofficial Exit signs with low contrast and poor visibility, such as those shown in Figures 1 and 2, are not allowed. If an individual unfamiliar with either of the areas in these Figures would need to use these exits, he or she may not be able to see the sign or exit the building because of decreased visibility due to smoke or loss of power.

All Exit signs must be illuminated in some fashion, but the principal way is by internally illuminated signs wired into emergency stand-by power. Although many internally illuminated signs are lit by incandescent or fluorescent bulbs, both electroluminescent and self-luminous Exit signs are now used as well.



Figure 2: Improper paper Exit sign

Electroluminescent signs have the advantage of not needing light bulbs in order to be illuminated, but they still need a steady power source. Self-luminous signs, which use a self-contained illumination source such as tritium, are advantageous when signs are required where electrical wiring installation would be a problem.



Figure 3: Non-illuminated Exit sign



Figure 4: Exit sign illuminated by an adjacent light

EXIT SIGN CONDITION

Exit signs must not only be present and easily visible, but also of the proper type and in good working condition. For example, Exit signs must point in the correct direction. Exit signs such as the one shown in Figure 3 are not acceptable, as the burned-out bulbs create poor visibility. The sign in Figure 4 is illuminated by the use of an adjacent light, which may also be a code violation if the adjacent light is neither continuously lit, nor on emergency or back-up power.

“NO EXIT” SIGNS

Signs indicating “No Exit” play a similar role to Exit signs. Just as Exit signs lead to correct exit passageways, No Exit signs, such as that pictured in Figure 5, lead away from incorrect passageways.

If you see an illuminated Exit sign that has a bulb burned out, or if you notice a sign without highly visible coloring or legible lettering, alert the responsible office as soon as possible.



Figure 5: “No Exit” sign

FAST STATS

- The Life Safety Code requires that Exits—other than main exterior Exit doors that obviously and clearly are identifiable as Exits—be marked by an approved sign that is readily visible from any direction of Exit access. (NFPA 101, Section 7.10.1.2)
- The Life Safety Code requires a minimum level of visibility for Exit signs. Specifically, signs must be located in such a location and be of such a size, distinctive color, and design that they are readily visible. All signs must also provide contrast with decorations, interior finish, or other signs, and may not be blocked by decorations, furnishings, or equipment that impairs visibility of a sign. Further, no brightly illuminated sign, display, or object that could detract from an Exit sign are permitted in or near the line of vision of an Exit sign. (NFPA 101, Section 7.10.1.8)
- The Life Safety Code requires that every sign required for Exit or Exit access—other than those where operations or processes require low lighting levels—must be suitably illuminated by a reliable light source. Externally and internally illuminated signs must be legible in both normal and emergency lighting mode. (NFPA 101, Section 7.10.5.1)
- The Life Safety Code requires that all doors, passages or stairways that are neither an exit nor a way of exit access—yet are likely to be mistaken for an exit—be identified with a “No Exit” sign. (NFPA 101, Section 7.10.8.3.1)
- The Life Safety Code requires that all Exit signs with a directional indicator be placed in every location where the direction of travel to reach the nearest exit is not apparent. (NFPA 101, Section 7.10.2)
- The Code of Federal Regulations requires that Exit signs be of a distinctive color, and be illuminated to a surface value of at least five foot-candles (54 lux) by a reliable light source. (29 CFR 1910.37 (b)(6))

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