



CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY CODE TALK

Campus Fire Safety e-NewZone

By: By: Kristin Bigda
Principal Fire Protection Engineer
National Fire Protection Association

Back to School: Requirements for operating features in education occupancies

Students have already returned to school for a new year and while they may not be thinking about the fire safety requirements that impact their return to school or how the NFPA 1: Fire Code plays a critical role in helping ensure they, their friends, teachers, and their school stay fire safe throughout the year, we are. As professionals, we're trained to know and follow the Fire Code and related requirements. Those requirements for operating features in schools that impact students on a daily basis, are as follows:

Emergency Action Plan

Emergency action plans are required for educational occupancies. Emergency action plans must contain information such as procedures for reporting of emergencies, occupant and staff response to emergencies, evacuation, relocation and shelter-in-place procedures appropriate to the building, its occupancy, emergencies, and hazards, appropriateness of the use of elevators, design and conduct of fire drills. See 10.8 for additional information.

Emergency Egress Drills

Upon returning to school, students will participate in emergency egress drills. The purpose of emergency egress and relocation drills is to educate the students in the fire safety features of the school, the egress facilities available, and the procedures to be followed. Section 10.5 of NFPA 1 requires drills be conducted as specified by the provisions of Chapter 20 of NFPA 1 or Chapter 11 through Chapter 42 of NFPA 101, *Life Safety Code*. Additional details applicable to all drills can be found in 10.5, if required. For example, in educational occupancies, drills are required as follows:

20.2.4.2.3 Emergency egress drills shall be conducted as follows:

(1) Not less than one emergency egress drill shall be conducted every month the facility is in session, unless both of the following criteria are met:

(a) In climates where the weather is severe, the monthly emergency egress drills shall be permitted to be deferred.

(b) The required number of emergency egress drills shall be conducted, and not less than four shall be conducted before the drills are deferred.

(2) All occupants of the building shall participate in the drill.



CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY CODE TALK

Campus Fire Safety e-NewZone

(3) One additional emergency egress drill, other than for educational occupancies that are open on a year-round basis, shall be required within the first 30 days of operation. [101: 14.7.2.3; 101: 15.7.2.3]

The local AHJ may also require additional action and drills must always be designed in cooperation with the local authorities. In some cases, emergency egress training programs may be substituted for up to four of the required monthly drills (see Section 20.2.4.2.2).

Among the hustle and bustle of a new school year drills must not be overlooked. While students might think they are familiar with their school, they must relearn the location of their new classroom and surroundings. Local authorities play an important role in assisting and verifying educational facilities in their jurisdiction are aware and compliant with the regulations for conducting egress drills and the minimum provisions found in the Fire Code. More details about drills in schools can be found in this post.

Inspection of Exit Facilities

Principals, teachers, or staff have a required duty to inspect all exit facilities daily to ensure that all stairways, doors, and other exits are in proper condition, with extra surveillance in open plan buildings to ensure that exit paths are maintained clear of obstruction and are obvious. While the provision permits staff to make such inspections, the inspection function is often better performed by maintenance personnel who have responsibility for, and intimate working knowledge of, the many building features and systems. Particular attention should be given to keeping all doors unlocked; keeping doors that serve to protect the safety of paths of egress closed and under no conditions blocked open, such as doors on stairway enclosures; keeping outside stairs and fire escape stairs free from all obstructions. (See 20.2.4.3)

More formally, door openings are required to be inspected in accordance with Section 7.2.1.15 of NFPA 101. The requirements apply only to specific doors noted in 7.2.1.15, such as those with panic or fire exit hardware, be inspected and tested not less than annually.

Furnishings and Decorations

Educational occupancies regulate draperies and curtains, the storage of clothing and other personal items, and also artwork as follows:

- Draperies, curtains, and other similar furnishings and decorations must meet the flame propagation performance criteria contained in Test Method 1 or Test Method 2, as appropriate, of NFPA 701, *Standard Methods of Fire Tests for Flame Propagation of Textiles and Films*. (See 20.2.4.4.1)



CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY CODE TALK

Campus Fire Safety e-NewZone

- As clothing hung on hooks along corridor walls or on racks in school lobbies greatly increases the combustibile load and will generally allow flame to spread quickly, it cannot be stored in corridors unless meeting one of the allowable conditions (control of fire by sprinklers, early warning of incipient-stage fire via smoke detection, or isolation of fuel packages by locating the clothing in metal lockers.) (See 20.2.4.4.2)
- Artwork and other teaching materials are permitted to be attached directly to the walls as long as it does not exceed 20 percent of the wall area in a nonsprinklered building and 50 percent in a fully sprinklered building. Because the combustibility of the artwork cannot be effectively controlled, the quantity, in terms of the percentage of wall area covered, is regulated to avoid creating a continuous combustibile surface that will spread flame across the room. (See 20.2.4.4.3)

NOTE: This article first appeared as a post on NFPA's blog, NFPA Today, in September 2017 as part of Ms. Bigda's "Fire Code Fridays" series, and has been edited.

Link to original blog:

<https://community.nfpa.org/community/nfpa-today/blog/2017/09/01/nfpa-1-back-to-school-requirements-for-operating-features-in-educational-occupancies-firecodefridays>

[Bonus material: Val Zivras, a principal engineer and staff liaison for NFPA 1, recently participated in a NFPA Live session and took a look at "back to school" code enforcement issues. She received a follow up question from member regarding school emergency actions plans. Watch the quick video to hear the question and answer.](#)



CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY CODE TALK

Campus Fire Safety e-NewZone



The Center for Campus Fire Safety

978.961.0410

SupportTeam@campusfiresafety.org