



Southwest New Brunswick Service Commission

Exit basics

Exits are a key part of almost every building beyond basic housing. In larger or complex buildings, there are all sorts of Code-required elements to an exit. However, there are also some misunderstandings about exits, exit doors, and the things that need to be near or around exits.

What makes an exit

An exit is a part of the area of a floor or building which has but one primary purpose: leaving a building in case of an emergency. It cannot be used for any other purpose – with the exception of accessing the floor area.

In some basic buildings, the exit will be nothing more complex than a door or a pair of doors. However, in more complex buildings, the exit will be its own enclosure, designed as a fire separation from the rest of the building.

Panic hardware

There is a misconception that panic hardware – doors with push bars or a push latch – are required in all commercial exits. This is not the case. These door latches are required

- In assembly buildings/suites (assembly use includes churches, restaurants, theatres, schools, arenas, etc..) with occupancy of 100 persons or more [3.3.2.7(1), 3.4.6.16(2)(a)];
- Every door leading from an exit shaft to an exit lobby in a building with a total occupant load greater than 100 3.4.6.16 (2)(b);
- Every exit door from a floor area containing a high-hazard industrial occupancy

Otherwise, the only requirement is that a door swing in the direction of exit travel and be easily opened without special knowledge. [3.3.1.3(2) and 9.9.6.7(1)(a)]

Lighting

On the other hand, one necessary item that is required when it comes to exits (and paths to exits) is emergency lighting. By Code, in any but private homes, emergency lighting is required for all exits, and main routes to exits. Lighting is also required in the corridors serving sleeping areas of care and treatment occupancies, corridors in schools, and in assembly-use buildings (arenas, theatres, etc) where public may

congregate. Additionally, emergency lighting is required for commercial kitchens. This emergency lighting has to have backup power capable of providing power to the lights for 30 minutes. [9.9.12.3 and 9.2.7.3]

Fire extinguishers

Regardless of the size or use of the building, anything other than a residential structure is subject to the requirement that fire extinguishers be placed in the building, and one of the criteria for this is that they are usually in or near an exit. [3.2.5.16(1) or 9.10.20.4(1)]

Exit signs



A typical exit sign - photo by Andrew Teoh on Unsplash

For many commercial buildings, exit signs are – surprisingly – not required as often as many believe. The considerations are [9.9.11.3(1) and 3.4.5.1.(1)]

- a building of three storeys in height;
- a building having an occupant load of 150 or more
- a room or area having a fire escape as a required means of egress
- Most doors in any A1 assembly use (theatres, playhouses) [exceptions: 3.3.2.4(4)],
- doors in dance halls, bars and similar that when occupied may have low-light conditions that prohibit easy identification of doors out of the building. [3.4.5.1(7)]

These exit signs, if required, must be at or near the exit doorway, as well as in areas that guide occupants to the exit if the exit isn't otherwise ordinarily visible (ie: corridors.)

There are some other requirements – many of them technical in nature – regarding exits. If necessary, these will be identified by either the designer (for complex buildings) and/or the building inspector during a plans review.