

Emergency Lighting & Exit Signs Decoded



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Emergency & exit lighting systems illuminate paths of egress during power outages or emergencies. These include both exit signs and emergency lights, and they play a critical role in ensuring safe evacuation for building occupants. These systems are required by building and fire codes for nearly all commercial structures.

System Components

- **Exit Signs:** Mark designated exit pathways. Typically illuminated and backed by battery or generator power.
- **Emergency Lights:** Provide lighting in corridors, stairwells, and other egress areas during power loss.
- **Battery Backup Units:** Power the signage and lighting systems when the normal electrical supply fails.
- **Test Switches:** Allow periodic function testing of the battery system.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Are emergency lights required in every area of a building?

A: Not necessarily. They are required in designated egress routes, stairwells, and any space necessary for occupant evacuation, per NFPA and local code.

Q: How long should emergency lighting remain on during a power outage?

A: Per NFPA 101, emergency lighting must remain illuminated for at least 90 minutes.

Q: Can LED fixtures fail even if the bulb is still good?

A: Yes. Circuit board issues or battery failure can cause LEDs to stop functioning properly even if the diodes are intact.

Q: Who is authorized to install or replace emergency exit lighting?

A: If a fixture is being replaced in the same location with existing wiring, it may not require a licensed electrician—especially if it's a simple plug-in or battery-operated model. However, any new installation or work involving new wiring or electrical circuits should be performed by a licensed electrician to meet code and safety requirements.

*** This information is provided as a general resource to assist property managers, building engineers, and facility management professionals in understanding fire and life safety best practices. It is not intended to serve as a comprehensive or exhaustive list of fire protection requirements.

Inspection & Maintenance Frequencies

(per NFPA 101)

Monthly - Functional test of at least 30 seconds to verify lights operate in emergency mode.

Annually - Full 90-minute duration test to ensure batteries and lamps perform for the required time.

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