

fast facts

advancing safety, health, and workplace rights in the legislative branch

Fire Doors

Keeping You Out of Harm's Way

The principal means of passive fire protection in structures is to completely enclose areas with fire barriers such as fire doors, walls, ceilings and floors. Fire barriers play an integral role in managing a fire by interrupting the spread of smoke, toxic gases and the fire itself from one fire zone to another.

What is a Fire Door?

Not all doors are fire doors. The Life Safety Code places very stringent regulations on fire doors and their closures, because of their importance as passive fire protection devices.

Fire doors are composed of a combination of materials, including steel,

gypsum and other fire-resistant materials. Some fire doors are equipped with windows, which must also have a rating or at least be subject to product certification. Fire-resistive windows may include wire mesh glass, liquid sodium silicate (or "water glass") between two window panes, ceramic glass or borosilicate glass.

Fire doors are fundamental to the integrity of fire barriers, because any time there is an access portal (such as a doorway) to a compartment, a fire barrier is broken temporarily. To minimize the break in protection, fire doors must be self-closing and have proper latching devices in order to provide protection against the spread of fire, smoke and toxic gases.



Figure 1: Fire door improperly held open by tying it to a wall.



Figure 2: Electromagnetic hold-open device. This is the only means by which a fire door may be held open.

When Are Fire Doors Needed?

In general, fire doors are needed whenever a door opening is present in a fire wall. Fire doors are also needed when a door has an "Exit" sign on or around it, when a door leads into exit stairwells and horizontal exits or when a door leads to a hazardous area such as flammable storage.

Potential Fire Door Hazards

Fire doors are often blocked open for the convenience of employees and visitors, creating a significant fire hazard for all building occupants because of the break created in the fire barrier. Fire doors should never be tied open or held open by unapproved devices, such as door wedges

or blocks. Doors that are designated as fire exit doors can be held open, but only if they automatically release when building smoke control or fire alarms are activated such as an electromagnetic hold-open device.

Even when closed, fire doors should never have their latch taped over. During a fire, hot gases can easily build up enough pressure to simply blow the fire doors open, rendering them useless.

A fire door and its frame can often be identified by a plate affixed to each, indicating the laboratory approval and the duration of fire rating. Painters must avoid painting over these plates, as this could prevent future determination of whether or not they are appropriate doors and frames.



Figure 3: Fire door latch improperly taped to hold the door open.

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- **OSHA regulations require that fire doors not be held open unless equipped with a device that releases the door upon activation of a fire alarm such as an electromagnetic hold-open device (29 CFR § 1910.36(a)(3)).**
- **Fire doors must be certified by a recognized testing laboratory—such as Underwriters Laboratories—and must have the laboratory’s certification label on the edge.**



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If you spot a safety hazard in your legislative branch workplace, contact the Office of Compliance to report it:
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