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RE: The practice of locking, blocking or otherwise barricading exit doors in Mercantile occupancies

In our society, security is an ever-growing concern, and at times solutions for enhancing the security of buildings conflict with the life safety concerns of building and fire codes. Practices such as locking primary entrance doors at night, creating exit serpentine, or blocking exits with carts violates a basic life safety principle. When not considered in the early stages of design, modifications such as these nullify a well thought out and approved design. The safety of occupants and employees is now threatened.

Designing and providing exiting as required by the fire and building codes establishes the primary method for the protection of people in buildings. The code requirements detail the size, arrangement, number, identification, and function of the exiting design. Once a design has been approved and installed, it may not be changed without going through another design and approval process. Altering in any way the approved exiting components is a serious matter and must not be undertaken without the review and approval of the fire and building code officials.

Blocked exits are among the most common egress problems. Obstructions, impediments, and storage or placement of articles in a manner that prevents access to, reduces the effective width, or extends the distance to egress elements are prohibited.

As recent events have demonstrated, the ability for people to rapidly exit is not just a fire concern. During active shooter situations and other traumatic or catastrophic events, access to exits has been instrumental in allowing people to escape and for rescuers to enter rapidly. Although the security purposes behind locking, blocking, or otherwise barricading exit doors is understandable, interfering with the basic safety provided by adequate exiting is a serious violation of the International Fire Code. The maintenance of emergency exiting is also a concern for the safety of employees as governed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Substantial fees and fines may be a consequence of failure to comply.

Mercantile occupancies will be issued a fire code violation for all instances where the established exits are locked, blocked or otherwise interfered with. To avoid the associated fees, fines, and legal ramifications associated with this violation, please join us in keeping exit pathways clear and functioning as designed.

See References Below:

Section 1001.2, IFC 2015. “It shall be unlawful to alter a building or structure in a manner that will reduce the number of exits or the capacity of the means of egress to less than required by this code.”

Section 1032.2, IFC 2015. “Required exit access, exits, and exit discharges shall be continuously maintained free from obstructions or impediments to full instant use in the case of fire or other emergency where the building area served by the means of egress is occupied. An exit or exit passageway shall not be used for any purpose that interferes with a means of egress.”

Exit Routes, Emergency Action Plans, and Fire Prevention Plans in Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1910.33-39; and OSHA Directive CPL 2-1.037, Compliance Policy for Emergency Action Plans and Fire Prevention Plans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Kral', written in a cursive style.

Bruce Kral

President

Fire Marshals Association of Colorado