

FDN(wh)Y Me?

As an aid to laboratories in avoiding FDNY Violation Orders (VO) and Summonses (SUM), EH&S distributes monthly FDNY inspection findings which resulted in a VO or SUM citation to an actual laboratory on either the Morningside or Medical Center campus. These real-life scenarios are meant to assist the research community in ensuring that such conditions do not exist in Columbia University laboratories.

April 2024 – Egress

Let's Make it Clear: The Importance of Unblocked Egress in Our Labs.

During a regular weekly inspection of Columbia University laboratories, the FDNY fire inspector issued a violation to a lab for a blocked egress resulting in an inaccessible exit (see photos below). Laboratory safety hinges on unobstructed egress paths, a fundamental aspect often overlooked. This might seem like a minor detail, but it's essential, especially in emergencies like fires or chemical spills.

Both researchers and lab managers need to be vigilant about inspecting and keeping exit routes free from any obstructions that could hinder escape. Ensuring exit doors open easily for quick evacuation, keeping pathways clear, and regularly inspecting emergency lighting and exit signs are all part of the deal. And don't forget about conducting drills to test response procedures. These actions help create a safe environment where lab personnel can focus on their work with confidence and peace of mind.



Photo: Although by itself a gas cylinder with loose tubing might not block the exit, paired with a large piece of equipment the walkway becomes tricky to navigate – especially in case of an emergency.

As always, please contact EH&S at labsafety@columbia.edu for any questions or guidance regarding proper segregation of hazardous materials or if any cabinets or chemicals look concerning.

Please note, the FDNY Laboratory Inspection Unit is on-site weekly at the Morningside and Irving Medical Center campuses. For a consultation before the FDNY inspector gets around to your lab, or for any question, concern, or help, please contact an EH&S Safety Advisor. <https://research.columbia.edu/safety-advisor-team>