

FDN(wh)Y Me?

As an aid to laboratories in avoiding FDNY Violation Orders (VO) and Summonses (SUM), EH&S distributes summaries of FDNY inspection findings which resulted in a VO or SUM 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.

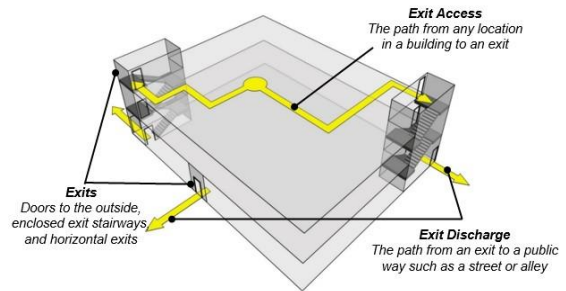
December, 2021

Obstruction of Egress

Each week, during regular inspections of Columbia University laboratories, the FDNY Fire Inspector performs a walk-through of selected laboratory spaces to ensure compliance with the NYC Fire code. Obstruction of the means of egress inside a laboratory or in the vicinity is one of the most common VOs issued by the inspector.

NYC Fire Code defines the means of egress as a continuous and unobstructed path of vertical and horizontal travel from any occupied portion of a building, structure or premises to a public way. A means of egress consists of three parts:

- Exit – the portion of the means of egress separated from other interior spaces by fire-resistant, rated construction and opening to provide a protected path of egress between the exit access and exit discharge. The door separating the laboratory from the hallways is considered an exit.
- Exit Access – the portion of the means of egress that leads from any occupied portion of the building or structure to an exit. A path from any point within the laboratory leading to the door is exit access.
- Exit Discharge – the portion of the means of egress from the termination of an exit to public way. A pathway from the laboratory door leading to a public way.



Maintaining the means of egress is a critical part of proper housekeeping that must be practiced by every laboratory. Obstructed or inadequate means of egress, for example due to door closure or improper equipment placement, pose a danger to the occupants of the laboratory. In case of emergency these conditions may prevent occupants from leaving the space quickly and safely. Blocking any part of the means of egress is not allowed at any time. Storage of large boxes, materials or instrumentation is also not allowed in hallways. That also applies to items that are intended for disposal. These shall be kept inside of laboratories until they are picked up by Facilities or removed by other means.

During surveys and other visits to laboratories, EH&S inspects if the means of egress is clear and in compliance with the NYC Fire Code. In any instance where improper storage of equipment or other items is observed, EH&S assists the research community by providing guidance on how to alleviate the problems and therefore avoid a potential VO.

Please note that FDNY Inspectors are authorized to conduct [Enhanced Inspection Surveys](#) to verify compliance for non-laboratory areas and general facilities/items. These enhanced surveys are done simultaneously with the annual laboratory inspections while *en route* to different rooms. A violation of the Enhanced Inspection Survey can lead to a direct summons, rather than a violation order.

For any questions related to maintaining the means of egress, or any other FDNY compliance related question, reach out to labsafety@columbia.edu.

References

1. NYC Fire Code 2014- Chapter 10- Means of Egress. Retrieved December 7, 2021, from [Chapter 10: Means of Egress, NYC Fire Code 2014 | UpCodes](#)
2. Components of the Means of Egress Picture Retrieved December 7, 2021, from [Chapter 4: Accessible Means of Egress \(access-board.gov\)](#)