



Fire Door Safety

The principal means of passive fire protection in structures is by completely enclosing areas with fire barriers. Fire barriers include fire doors, walls, ceilings, and floors. Fire barriers play an integral role in managing a fire by interrupting the spread of smoke, other toxic gasses, and the fire itself from one fire zone into another.

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 as much resistance as possible to the spread of fire, smoke, and toxic gasses.

Fire exit doors are often held 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. Doors that are designed to be fire exit doors can be held open, but only if they automatically release when building fire alarms are activated.

Fast Facts About Fire Doors

Proper Fire Doors and Fire Door Self-Closing Devices are Required

- Not all doors are fire doors: Fire doors must be certified by recognized testing laboratories (such as UL) and must have the laboratory's certification label
- OSHA regulations require that fire doors not be held open unless equipped with a device that releases the door upon activation of the fire alarm [29 CFR §1910.36 (a)(3)]
- The Life Safety Code places very stringent regulations respecting fire doors and their closures because of their importance as passive fire protection devices

When Fire Doors are Needed

- Where a door has an EXIT sign on or around it
- Where a door leads to exit stairwells and horizontal exits
- Where a door leads to a hazardous area such as flammable storage
- In general, where a door leads to a hallway or from one fully enclosed room to another

Hazards to Avoid With Fire Doors

- Fire doors should never be tied open or held open by unapproved devices, such as door wedges and blocks
- Fire doors can only be held open by a device that automatically releases when the fire alarm is 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 cause fire doors to blow open

Office of Compliance Safety and Health **FAST FACTS**

Proper Fire Doors and Improper Fire Door Openings

At right is an example of a fire door that has been improperly held open by tying it to the wall. Fire doors can only be held open by a device that automatically releases when the fire alarm is activated (such as an electromagnetic hold open device)



To the left is the testing laboratory's label on the inside edge of the door indicating that it is properly rated as a fire door. Fire doors must be certified by recognized testing laboratories (such as UL) and must have the laboratory's certification label on the edge.
