



# Five Minutes to *Fire Safety*

## Topic: Three Parts of an Exit

You may have noticed that many of the things we look at during inspections have to do with exiting. Fire alarm systems notify building occupants so they can exit. Emergency lights make sure the exit paths are visible. Exit signs show occupants where the exits are located. Building separation protects exit paths so they can be used. As inspectors, we tend to be very concerned about doors, their panic hardware, and their locking mechanisms. In every inspection, we make sure the doors - even though they may be locked in one direction - allow building occupants to exit the building easily and without hindrance.

We're used to thinking of an exit as just being the door that gets you from the inside of a building to the outside, but from a life safety standpoint there are a few more components. According to the National Fire Protection Association, which is where many of the fire safety requirements come from, a means of egress is "a continuous and unobstructed way of travel from any point in a building or structure to a public way." It consists of three parts - the exit access, the exit itself, and the exit discharge.

The **exit access** gets you from wherever you are in the building to the exit. Exit access generally includes the intervening rooms, corridors, hallways, and lobbies you travel through to get to the actual exit. The **exit** is usually just the door between inside and outside, but it can include protected hallways, corridors, and stair towers. The **exit discharge** gets you from that exit out to a "public way," which is a street or alley. It includes outside walkways, sidewalks, and anything between a required exit door and the street or alley. All three parts of the exit must be protected and available for instantaneous use.

Why is this distinction important? The next edition of "Five Minutes to Fire Safety" will explore some specific requirements for the exit discharge. Stay tuned for more information!

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