



Fire Egress vs Door Security

Maintaining security in a building while maintaining emergency evacuation paths is a problem in many buildings. The New Zealand Building Code has strict rules on ensuring exit doors are always available, and there are solutions which work in both interests. A locked fire exit places people at risk of being trapped in an emergency, and can place a building owner at risk of prosecution.

The building code requires doors which are part of a fire escape must be “able to be unlocked at all times without the use of a key, code, or other security device”. This means doors must be unlocked, or able to be unlocked at all times a building is legally occupied – you are able to secure fire exits after hours as long as these are unlocked by the first person to arrive each day, and a “Lock Management Plan” is registered with the council. Records have to be kept on daily locking and unlocking of doors.



Keys cannot be used at all, including keys hung near the door, or keys available in a break-glass type container. Doors must not have a key-type lock fitted, but can have a snib lock or a ‘free handle’ – a door handle which is locked from the outside, but allows the handle to be opened always from the inside. Doors should be able to be opened with one hand, in a normal manner and the lock mechanism should be able to be reached by a person of any height.



Electronic locking devices can be used however there must be an emergency over-ride to the lock which is clearly marked and easily accessible by everyone. The lock must lock when power is on, and automatically unlock when power is off. The emergency over-ride switch must be a physical break of the power to the lock, and not an input to a controller device, which in turn releases the door. The switch can be set to sound an alarm or notify others, but the switch must also actually break the power source to the lock. Push-to-release buttons do not comply. Power-to-unlock devices do not comply.



Magnetic clamp locks must not be used inside a door frame unless the clamp remains higher than the minimum required door height.



Access-control systems such as card or PIN-access security systems are required to be inspected by an IQP annually for the Building Warrant of Fitness, and must be listed on the Compliance Schedule.