

CLARIFICATION ON FIRE SAFETY/SECURITY BULLETIN 2013-1

School Security, Locking of Classroom Doors

Upon receipt of my previously emailed bulletin on the use of magnetic door strips, several Facilities Managers correctly pointed out that in the bulletin it excludes doors that are a part of an opening protective in a fire rated assembly. Most classroom doors, except for very old school buildings, are fire rated with the intent of containing a fire in a classroom and not allowing smoke and flames to enter the hallway, which is part of the means of egress out of the building. This interpretation would exclude virtually all use of the magnetic strips since almost every classroom door leads to a hallway that would be used for egress purposes. As noted in my original email, hindering the latching device on a fire rated door is in direct violation of the fire codes.

I contacted a code compliance specialist at the NJ Division of Fire Safety (DFS) to obtain a clarification. He stated that for the purposes of this bulletin, the DFS is not considering the hallway exit access as a fire rated assembly. The Division would only consider doors that were in a fully enclosed, fire rated assembly such as a stair tower or corridor that, by design, is protected for safe egress from the building. It is unlikely that you would have a classroom door open directly into a fire rated stair tower or enclosed corridor that is solely designed for compartmentalization purposes. If that were the case, then any door into those protected areas must remain closed and latched.

However, for the vast majority of classroom doors the DFS is permitting the use of the magnetic strips. This is contingent on approval by the local Fire Official or Authority Having Jurisdiction, so it is not a blanket approval. Also, I would caution any schools to use these magnets as a short term solution only. Installation of approved security locks on the classroom doors is a far better solution. It eliminates the fire code issues altogether, maintains the fire rated barriers that the doors were designed for and maintains the security of the classroom against unauthorized entry should the teacher forget to remove the strip at the end of the day or when they are not present in the room. We have had student injuries result from unauthorized entry into classrooms when no one was present.

Hopefully, this clarifies the issue and points out some of the shortcomings of using these security devices. If you have any questions, please contact me. Thank you.

John

John W. Geitz
Risk Assessment Services, LLC



Creating Safer, Healthier Schools

ACCASBO • BCIP • GCSSD • SEJIF
www.spelljif.com • (856) 446-9128

John Geitz
JIF Safety Coordinator
(P) 856.218-8772
safetyfirst@comcast.net



BULLETIN: 2013-1

SUBJECT: School Security, Locking of Classroom Doors

REFERENCE: N.J.A.C. 5:70-3, Chapter 10, Means of Egress

ISSUE DATE: February 22, 2013

As a result of recent incidents involving school security, the Division of Fire Safety has received a number of questions regarding the securing of classroom doors.

Classroom doors can be locked to prevent entry from the outside of the classroom if in compliance with Section 1008.1.8 which requires the door to be openable from the side of egress without the use of a key or special knowledge or effort.

A device that slides under the door to prevent entry can be acceptable if staff is trained in its use and is constantly positioned inside to remove it if necessary. The installation or use of a hasp lock mechanism, a slide bolt or a door wedge is absolutely prohibited.

Another device that is being used on classroom door frames is magnetic strips that cover the latch opening. This strip prevents the door latch from latching or locking and is removed in an emergency allowing the door to latch and lock. This is permitted as long as egress can be made from the occupied side and the door is not part of an opening protective in a fire rated assembly.

In any case where the actual door hardware is being altered or changed, a construction permit is required.

Fire Officials are encouraged to work with schools to ensure that the need to provide security is met while maintaining the intent of the fire code.

This bulletin will remain in effect until withdrawn or replaced. Questions regarding this bulletin are to be directed to the Bureau of Fire Code Enforcement at 609-633-6132 or through our website – www.state.nj.us/dca/divisions/dfs.