

U.S. Fire Administration / National Fire Academy

Coffee Break Training

Topic: Exit Door Clear Opening Width

Learning objective: The student shall be able to describe the maximum obstruction size that may reduce required exit width.

For many business owners, the threat of break-in or robbery is more immediate to them than the likelihood of a fire. As a result, inspectors will find many creative ways that owners try to enhance their business security, but that end up being clear violations of the fire safety regulations.

This picture illustrates an all-too-common problem. For reinforcement to the panic hardware locking device, the owner has installed a homemade security bar assembly across the door. A metal bar laid across the padded angled brackets holds the door shut so it can't be yanked open from the outside.

The angled brackets protrude 10 inches from the face of the door. All of the model fire and building codes limit the amount the door may project into the required egress width to 7 inches when the door is fully open. For example, if the required exit width is 32 net inches, it may be reduced to 25 inches when the door is fully open, not 22 inches as this arrangement shows.



This homemade security system compromises the required egress width.

Photo courtesy the Cuyahoga Falls (Ohio) Fire Department.

If you look closely at the photograph, you also will see that there is no landing on the exterior side of the door. Current codes require a landing at least as wide as the door and at least 44 inches long in the direction of exit travel. A person stepping out of this door in the dark is likely to trip on the adjacent curb.

Fire inspectors should work closely with business owners to resolve conflicts between security issues and emergency egress protection.

For additional information, refer to refer to *International Fire Code*[®], Chapter 10; *NFPA 1, Uniform Fire Code*[™], Chapter 14; and *NFPA 101*[™], *Life Safety Code*[®], Chapter 7.