



CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY CODE TALK

Don't Compromise Fire Safety While Responding to Coronavirus: Keep Fire Doors Operable

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As incidents of the coronavirus have continued to climb in the U.S., you'd be hard-pressed to get through the past couple of months without hearing reports of its spread. All of this is understandably generating conversation and concern among all of us.

While no one knows what the true extent of the virus or its impact will be, it's clear that everyone is thinking hard about ways to implement preventative measures for keeping safe.

At NFPA, we've heard that some facilities have begun propping fire doors open so that people don't have to touch them to open them. While I can see the logic in terms of germ spread prevention, propping fire doors open presents significant hazards and risks in the event of a fire.

It is imperative that we not forfeit institutional elements of safety while working to address others. In this case, we need to balance the risk of the coronavirus against other real hazards that have the potential to harm multiple people in a very short window of time.

NFPA codes and standards such as [NFPA 1, Fire Code](#), [NFPA 101, Life Safety Code](#), and [NFPA 80, Standard for Fire Doors and Other Opening Protectives](#), govern the installation, inspection, testing and maintenance of fire doors. Fire doors and other opening protectives such as shutters and windows must be operable at all times. Operability of these systems includes opening, closing and latching. Fire doors must be kept closed and latched or arranged to be automatic closing during the time of a fire. In addition, blocking or wedging of doors in the open position is prohibited, as it violates the required operation and closing feature of the door.

While it may seem more "convenient" or in this case, a safer option from the perspective of spreading germs, interfering with fire door operation can have grave consequences during a fire. In addition, allowing fire doors to be held open runs a risk of this becoming an accepted practice in the building for any number of situations. Building residents and staff should be taught code-compliant solutions and should not get into a habit of overriding fire safe practices.

Anything that could prevent the door from closing and latching properly during an emergency condition such as propping the door open with objects, taping the latch, using wood wedges or kick-down door



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stops, or overriding the closing device, is a violation of the standards. If they are to be effective, fire doors must be not only closed but also held closed. Building fires are capable of generating pressures sufficient to force fire doors open if they are not held closed with enough latching force, thereby rendering the doors incapable of protecting the opening in which they are installed and potentially allowing the fire to spread to an adjacent space and beyond the compartment of origin.

The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) offers a wealth of information, guidelines, and [resources for cleaning and disinfecting facilities](#) in the community setting.

NOTE: This article first appeared as a post on NFPA's blog, NFPA Today, on March 9, 2020, and has been edited.

Link to blog:

<https://community.nfpa.org/community/nfpa-today/blog/2020/03/09/fire-and-life-safety-can-t-be-compromised-to-address-the-coronavirus-fire-doors-must-remain-closed>



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