



**Department
of Commerce**

John R. Kasich, Governor
David Goodman, Director

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

DIVISION OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL AND BOARD OF BUILDING STANDARDS

To: Fire Code Officials, Building Code Officials and School System Superintendents

From: Larry L. Flowers, State Fire Marshal 

Gerald Holland, Chair of the Board of Building Standards 

Date: February 20, 2013

Re: **ADVISORY STATEMENT – EGRESS IN EDUCATIONAL OCCUPANCIES**

As a part of the ongoing efforts to improve K-12 school building safety in light of recent events, many schools are updating their site safety training programs and building safety features. As a part of this process, the Ohio Department of Commerce's Division of State Fire Marshal (SFM) and Board of Building Standards (BBS), are reminding school officials that, based upon a tragic history of loss of life in school fires, the agencies have implemented specific regulations in the Ohio Building Code (OBC) and Ohio Fire Code (OFC) for the construction and maintenance of schools. These regulations include the important life safety systems in school buildings and in the training school children receive in the steps to take during emergency situations. The results of these efforts are that, even though fires still occur in Ohio schools, Ohio has not experienced a single fire death in a school building in decades making schools one of the safest occupancy types.

Some of the important fire safety concepts of the OFC and OBC include:

- New Construction: Ohio law requires that all newly constructed schools comply with the construction requirements in the OBC, including meeting the OBC's fire protection system and egress requirements. This process includes the submission of construction documents describing the fire protection and egress system plans created by a design professional to, and for review and approval by the building code official having jurisdiction. The actual construction of a school must include specific types of OBC compliant locking arrangements for all doors in the means of egress.
- Altered Buildings: Should any changes be made to an existing school building, including to the locking arrangements in a means of egress or in the egress itself, such changes must be made in accordance with the Chapter 10 of the OBC. Specifically, changes to doors, door swings, door hardware, paths of travel, travel distances, etc. must meet the requirements set forth in the OBC for new construction. Many changes, such as the installation of manually operated flush bolts or surface bolts, like a manual bar system to

slide through eye bolts to secure classroom doors, are not a code complaint option. These manual bolting configurations would create very dangerous compromises to the egress system of a school, especially in light of code compliant options that work within the safety parameters built into the codes

- Existing Buildings: OBC §3401.1 and 3401.2 require that, as a condition of their occupancy, buildings must be maintained in accordance with their approval and the conditions of their Certificate of Occupancy. Changes to existing buildings must be described and submitted for review for compliance and approval by the building department having jurisdiction. OFC §1030.2 requires all exit accesses, exits and exit discharges to be continuously maintained free from obstructions or impediments to their full instant use in case of fire or other emergency.

BBS and SFM recognize the importance of site safety plans and training programs, but we do not endorse or reject any specific site safety plan in lieu of required approvals from the local political subdivision's certified building department and, as applicable, the fire code official and any other oversight agency. However, as schools review their safety features, everyone must remember that there are code requirements common to the exiting system in Educational occupancies:

- Doors in the means of egress must be readily openable from the egress side without the use of a key or special knowledge or effort;
- Manually operated flush bolts or surface bolts are not permitted;
- The unlatching of any door or leaf in the means of egress shall not require more than one operation.

For questions about the application of the OFC to a school, please contact:

Ohio Department of Commerce
Division of State Fire Marshal
Code Enforcement Bureau
8895 East Main Street
1-888-252-0803
websfm@com.state.oh.us

For questions about the application of the OBC to a school, please contact:

Ohio Department of Commerce
Board of Building Standards
6606 Tussing Road
P.O. Box 4009
Reynoldsburg, OH 43068
614 | 644 2613