

SUGGESTED ORDINANCE

An Ordinance Providing for Safety
to Life in Places of Assembly



EDITION OF JANUARY, 1943

Recommended by the

NATIONAL BOARD OF FIRE UNDERWRITERS

(A National Organization of Capital Stock Fire Insurance
Companies Established in 1866)

COMMITTEE ON FIRE PREVENTION AND ENGINEERING STANDARDS

**85 JOHN STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y.**

An Ordinance Providing for Safety to Life in Places of Assembly

1. Application.

(a) All places of assembly as defined in paragraph (b) of this section shall comply with the provisions of this ordinance. In the application of this ordinance to existing places of assembly the enforcing official may modify such of its provisions as would require structural changes if in his opinion adequate safety may be obtained otherwise and provided that a permanent record is kept of such modifications and the reasons therefor.

(b) "Place of assembly" as used in this ordinance shall mean a room or space in which provision is made for the seating of 100 or more persons for religious, recreational, educational, political, social or amusement purposes or for the consumption of food or drink. For the purpose of this definition such room or space shall include any occupied connecting room or space in the same story, or in a story or stories above or below, where entrance is common to the rooms or spaces.

(c) A permit shall be obtained by the owner or operator of any place of assembly. Such permit shall be issued for one year from date of issue and shall be revokable for cause. Application for permit shall be made to the Chief of the Fire Department* who may require building plans, showing type of construction, exits, aisles and seating arrangements, and details of decorations, and no permit shall be issued until the provisions of this ordinance have been complied with. In addition, the Chief of the Fire Department shall obtain the approval of the Health, Police and other departments having jurisdiction as to compliance with any laws or ordinances applying to the specific occupancy of the place of assembly.

2. Decorative Materials.

(a) All combustible decorative material, including curtains, acoustical materials, streamers, cloth, cotton batting, straw, vines, leaves, trees and moss, but not including floor coverings, shall be rendered flameproof; provided this shall not be required of materials not exceeding one sixteenth inch in thickness applied directly to and adhering to a noncombustible base. Such flameproofing, unless certified by Under-

*Some cities may place the issuance of permits and the enforcement of the ordinance in the Fire Commissioner, Fire Committee or Bureau of Fire Prevention, in which case this reference and others throughout the ordinance should be changed.

writers' Laboratories, Inc., or other laboratories of recognized standing as being of a permanent nature, shall be tested by the fire department each six months and the treatment renewed if necessary.

(b) The use of imitation leather (or other material) consisting of or coated with a pyroxylin base is prohibited.

3. Aisles.

For each room or space used with chairs alone or with tables and chairs, the arrangement shall be such as will provide for ready access by aisles to each exit doorway. Aisles leading directly to exit doorways shall have not less than 36 inches clear width which shall not be obstructed by chairs, tables or other objects.

4. Exits Defined.

(a) "Exit way" means the exit doorway or doorways, or such doorways together with connecting hallways, passage-ways or stairways, through which persons may pass safely from the place of assembly to a street or to an open space which provides safe access to a street. Exit ways from any room may lead through other rooms of the same tenancy.

(b) "Exit doorway" means the doorway or other opening through which persons may pass in using an exit way.

5. Basis for Determining Exits.

The basis of exit requirements shall be one person to each fifteen square feet of gross area occupied, not including store rooms. When application is made for a permit in which the number of persons to be accommodated, either in any given room or space or in the gross area of the place of assembly, is greater than this basis, the exit requirements shall be based upon this greater number. Where the existing exit facilities for any room or space accommodating 100 or more people are not sufficient on the above basis of one person to fifteen square feet, the number of persons permitted shall be reduced in proportion to the exits existing. Where the place of assembly is largely occupied by chairs or chairs and tables, no greater number of chairs shall be permitted than that for which exits have been provided. Chairs shall include stools or other seating arrangements.

6. Exit Doorways.

(a) Every room, gallery, balcony, tier or other space having a capacity of 100 or more persons shall have at least two exit doorways. In existing places of assembly located on the first or grade floor a single exit doorway may be used to provide exit for not more than 200 persons provided the doorway has a clear width of not less than 44 inches. The exit doorways shall be so located that no point in the room or space is more than 100 feet distant from an exit doorway, measured along the line of travel.

(b) The aggregate clear width of doorways serving as required exits shall be not less than at the rate of 22 inches for every 100 persons to be accommodated. No exit doorway shall have a clear width of less than 34 inches, corresponding to a nominal 36-inch door, except that existing exit doorways having a clear width of at least 24 inches may be accepted.

(c) Exit doorways shall be located with proper regard to safety of the occupants and ease of exit. The size and shape of the room or space, the accessibility of streets and open spaces, the ability to use horizontal exits and the desirability of good separation of exit doorways shall be considered.

7. Exit Ways.

Every room, gallery, balcony, tier or other space having a capacity of more than 200 persons shall have at least two exit ways, and where the capacity is more than 600 persons at least three exit ways, and where the capacity is more than 1,000 persons at least four exit ways. Such required exit ways may use communicating hallways, corridors or passage ways, and exit ways from two or more separate places of assembly may use common interior stairways, but the required exit ways for any one place of assembly shall not use a common interior stairway.

8. Exit Doors.

(a) All exit doors in rooms occupied by 50 or more persons and all exit doors in exit ways from places of assembly shall be hung to swing in the direction of exit travel, but this requirement shall not be construed to prohibit doors swinging both inwards and outwards.

(b) Revolving doors shall not be used in required exit ways except under one or more of the following conditions:

- (1) Where the place of assembly is in a building of fire-proof construction, with no hangings, draperies or decorations of cloth or paper, other than flameproofed curtains.
- (2) Where the place of assembly and the remainder of the building are protected by an automatic sprinkler system.
- (3) Where the place of assembly has a capacity of not over 200 persons and has no hangings, draperies or decorations of cloth or paper other than flameproofed curtains, and there is an exit door of the swinging type adjacent to each revolving door.
- (4) Where a place of refuge is provided for all occupants of the place of assembly in portions of the building between the exit doors of the place of assembly and the revolving doors, and there is an exit door of the swinging type adjacent to each revolving door. Such

place of refuge may consist of hallways, stairways, or areas separated from the place of assembly by fire walls or fire partitions.

(c) Revolving doors shall be used in exit ways only at points of egress from the first story above grade.

(d) All revolving doors in exit ways shall be of an approved type which will collapse under pressure, and only the width of one leaf shall be considered in figuring exit requirements. Employees shall be instructed in the method of collapsing revolving doors, and the doors shall be tested by collapsing at least once a month.

(e) During the period of occupancy, no exit door shall be locked, bolted, or otherwise fastened so that the door can not be opened from the inside by the use of the ordinary door knob or by pressure on the door or on a panic release device.

In a place of assembly with a permitted capacity in excess of 500, and elsewhere where deemed necessary, the exit doors shall be provided with approved panic bar release device.

9. Marking of Exits.

(a) In rooms accommodating more than seventy-five persons, required exit doorways, other than those normally used for entrance, shall be plainly marked by approved exit signs, sufficiently illuminated when the floor area is occupied, to be readily distinguished.

(b) Directional signs, as required, shall be placed on walls or otherwise displayed in conspicuous locations to direct occupants to exits.

10. Lighting of Exits.

(a) Required exit ways shall be kept adequately lighted at all times that the place of assembly served thereby is occupied.

(b) Where the number of persons exceeds 75 in any room the artificial lighting of the room and of exit ways therefrom shall be by electricity so arranged and supplied that interruption of supply to any lighting branch circuit will not result in extinguishment of all the lights in the room or all the lights along any exit way.

11. Use of Exits.

No part of a stairway, whether interior or exterior, nor of a fire tower, nor of a hallway, corridor, vestibule, balcony or bridge leading to a stairway or exit of any kind, shall be used in any way that will obstruct its use as an exit or that will present a hazard of fire.

12. Stairways.

(a) Construction.—Where a place of assembly is located above the second story above grade interior exit stairways shall continue to the roof; provided that in case of roofs

having a pitch exceeding one in four, such stairways shall not extend through the roof but shall be connected by a communicating hallway in the top story.

Except in existing buildings, required interior exit stairways from a place of assembly shall be constructed of non-combustible materials throughout. All stairways shall have solid risers securely fastened in place.

When treads or landings are of slate, marble, stone or composition, they shall be suitably supported for their entire length and width.

Treads and landings shall be constructed and maintained in a manner to prevent persons from slipping thereon.

(b) Enclosures for Stairways.—Every interior stairway constituting part of an exit way from a place of assembly shall be enclosed with partitions having a fire resistance rating of not less than two hours, provided that in existing buildings the enclosure shall have a fire resistance rating of not less than one hour.

(c) Width of Stairways and Connecting Passageways.—The aggregate width of exit stairways in any story shall be not less than at the rate of twenty-two inches for every one hundred persons to be accommodated by such stairway. The minimum width shall be 36 inches.

The hallway or corridor connecting a stairway with the exit doors leading to the street, or to a court or open space communicating with a street, shall have a clear width of not less than the aggregate required widths of stairways served thereby.

(d) Treads and Risers.—Risers shall not exceed seven and three-quarter inches in height, and treads, exclusive of nosing, shall be not less than nine and one-half inches wide. Treads and risers shall be of uniform width and height in any one story.

The use of winders is prohibited in required stairways.

(e) Ramps used as required exit ways shall have a gradient not exceeding one foot in ten.

(f) No place of assembly shall be allowed above the second floor in any frame building. Where the place of assembly is on the second story of a frame building at least one-half the required exit capacity shall be provided by exterior stairways, or stairways separated from the first floor by fire partitions and extending direct to the street.

(g) All exterior stairways shall be constructed of non-combustible material, except that wooden construction may be permitted on existing buildings occupied by places of assembly on the second floor where the stairway extends at right angles to the building wall, or there are no openings below or within ten feet of the stairway.

13. Ash Trays.

Where smoking is permitted, there shall be provided on each table and at other convenient places suitable noncombustible ash trays or match receivers.

14. Fire Appliances.

(a) The Chief of the Fire Department shall survey, or cause to be surveyed, each place of assembly and shall designate suitable fire appliances in and near boiler rooms, kitchens, storage rooms and other occupied areas where such appliances are deemed to be needed. Such fire appliances may consist of automatic alarm systems, automatic sprinklers, standpipe and hose, or portable extinguishers.

(b) All fire appliances shall be kept in working condition; all extinguishers and hose and similar appliances shall be visible and handy at all times. It shall be the duty of the owner and the occupant of each building, or part of a building, occupied as a place of assembly to properly train sufficient regular employees in the use of fire appliances that such appliances can be quickly put in operation.

15. Inspection by Fire Department.

The Chief of the Fire Department shall inspect, or cause to be inspected, each place of assembly. Such inspection shall be at least monthly and at such times, including time of occupancy and use, as to assure compliance with these regulations and such orders as may be issued in connection with the maintenance of aisle space, the prevention of overcrowding, the use of decorations, the maintenance of exits, collapse of revolving doors, and the maintenance of fire appliances. Where conditions are unsatisfactory written orders for immediate correction shall be given.

16. Placard Indicating Capacity.

A placard indicating the capacity of any room in number of occupants, other than employees, shall be displayed in a prominent place in the room. Such placard shall be properly attested by the Chief of the Fire Department. Any persons in excess of this capacity shall not be provided for through the introduction of additional seats or chairs.

Note: Provisions applying to penalties for non-compliance with requirements and to temporary or permanent revocation of permits should be included, in accord with State acts relating thereto.