



Emergency lighting is installed to give occupants enough light to exit during an evacuation. Emergencies that require evacuation may also affect the normal lighting in an area. No exit path is an adequate exit without illumination.

The codes allow emergency lighting to be provided in different ways but the most common methods are by battery powered lights or by an emergency generator. Battery powered emergency lights are relatively inexpensive, reliable, readily available off-the-shelf, and easy to install. Units that are tested, listed, and labeled by a recognized testing lab such as Underwriter's Laboratories help provide assurance of performance and reliability.

Installation Pointers

Emergency lighting is required to illuminate routes leading to a required emergency exit. These routes include stairs, aisles, corridors, ramps, escalators, and passageways. An average of 1 footcandle at the floor is the minimum required level of illumination but proper installations usually exceed this level. It is recommended to install more emergency lighting units in marginal areas. The best way for you to check the level of light is to simply try the emergency lighting on a dark night, or by shutting off the normal illumination to determine if the exit paths are adequately lit.

The units should be installed to provide adequate coverage over the entire area. A two-light unit can be installed halfway down the length of a corridor and the lights pointed in each direction to cover both directions in the corridor. Don't aim the lights where they will regularly shine directly in someone's eyes. It is better to light the path at the floor and illuminate the exit. Be certain the lights are connected to the lighting circuit so they will work when the lights fail, even if other circuits remain energized.

Where Emergency Lighting is Required

Emergency lighting is required to be installed in all commercial buildings.

Testing and Maintenance

Emergency lighting systems and units must be periodically tested to determine operability in an emergency. Testing will also indicate which units need maintenance or replacement. The Fire Codes require that the emergency power system must provide power for a duration of not less than 90 minutes. The lights must be tested for 30 seconds each month and 90 minutes annually to verify operation. Written records must be kept of the testing and be available for inspection.

Additional Federal Healthcare Requirements

Emergency lighting units must consist of 2 bulbs; as the failure of any single bulb must not result in illumination levels less than the minimum required. Emergency lights are not allowed to be tied into a light switch as that switch may interrupt the restoration of lights. All emergency lights must be tested for 30 seconds monthly and 90 minutes annually.