

EMERGENCY LIGHTING TESTING

Emergency lighting provides two safeguards for a building in the event of power failure: First, safe and prompt access to emergency exits (egress), and second, to provide lighting of sufficient levels, and for a sufficiently long duration, to permit safe and orderly shut-down of processes that might become hazardous if simply abandoned.

Frequently, inspectors find that emergency lighting units have been installed and subsequently forgotten. Most emergency lighting units use batteries, which have a limited life span, and are subject to failure without warning. The “charging” light may be lit on the units, but this does not guarantee the lights will come on when the power fails.

The National Fire Protection Life Safety Code, (Standard 101) requires that emergency lighting units be able to provide illumination for 1-1/2 hours after power failure, and at a level sufficiently bright enough to allow persons to see their way to exits, or to safely shut down processes and machinery, etc.

Testing of emergency lighting units is required in section 31-1.3.8, “Periodic Testing of Emergency Lighting Equipment.”:

“A functional test shall be conducted on every required emergency lighting system at 30-day intervals for a minimum of 30 seconds. An annual test shall be conducted for the 1 ½ hour duration. Equipment shall be fully operational for the duration of the test. Written records of testing shall be kept by the owner for inspection by the authority having jurisdiction.”

This means that approximately **monthly, the “push-button” test should be conducted**, typically by pressing the “test” button on the unit, and **holding it for 30 seconds**. If the device does not light, or the lamps are dim, or if it fails to light at full brilliance for 30 seconds, the unit should be serviced, repaired, or replaced.

The annual test requires that the power actually be interrupted to the emergency lighting unit, by unplugging it, throwing a circuit breaker, or other safe means, so no line power reaches it. The unit must provide light of normal brilliance for 1 ½ hours, or it should be serviced or replaced.

A simple log, describing the building’s emergency lighting equipment, by numbering system, or other system, having a space for test dates and times, the tester’s name, results of the test, and comments for referring failed tests to the appropriate persons for repair or replacement, should be maintained. A sample of such a form follows on the next page.

<p>IMPORTANT NOTE: YOUR LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT, BUILDING INSPECTIONS / PERMITS DEPARTMENT, OR OTHER AUTHORITY (“Authority Having Jurisdiction”) MAY HAVE REQUIREMENTS THAT DIFFER FROM THESE MINIMAL STANDARDS. IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU CHECK WITH THEM FOR GUIDANCE AND QUESTIONS.</p>
