



Means of Egress: Recognizable Doors

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Learning Objective: The student shall be able to explain the requirement that doors in the means of egress must be clearly recognizable.

Interior designers, decorators, and owners often select colors, patterns, and styles to convey a specific message or theme about their business.

Occasionally, these design treatments create so much “visual clutter” that it is nearly impossible to distinguish the means of egress from the adjacent walls. During an emergency, building occupants should have clear visual clues to identify the quickest and safest way out of a building.

To avoid problems and prevent confusion, the model fire and building codes require that means of egress doors be “readily distinguishable” from the adjacent construction and wall finishes so the doors are easily recognizable as doors. Mirrors or similar reflecting materials may not be used on egress doors. No doors in the means of egress may be concealed by curtains, drapes, decorations, or similar materials.

In the illustrated example, the designer applied colorful and visually contrasting wallpaper to the door leaves. There is no way that the doors would be confused with the adjacent wall finishes.

There is one concern with this solution, though. The wallpaper that was applied must meet the appropriate flame spread requirements for the place of assembly where these doors are located. In this example, since the building in which it is located is protected by an automatic sprinkler system; the wallpaper must have a Class C flame spread rating. In fact, all of the wall finishes in this space must have a Class C flame spread rating.

For additional information, refer to the International Building Code® or International Fire Code®, Chapter 10, NFPA 5000®, Building Construction and Safety Code®, Chapter 11, NFPA 1, Uniform Fire Code®, Chapter 14, or NFPA 101®, Life Safety Code®, Chapter 7.



The pattern on these doors provides a clear contrast to the adjacent wall.

