



References (s): 06-IFC/1006.1, 06-101/7.8.1.2; 7.8.2.1

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FIRE FACT 051 – NORMAL ILLUMINATION

Imagine yourself in an unfamiliar building, walking the hallways, when the lights go out. Darkness is all around and you stumble around a small table. Finally someone realizes that the light switch was inadvertently turned off and they turned it back on.

This scenario, as well as many others, could play out daily in any occupancy type. That is why it's important for facilities to provide "Normal Illumination".

Normal illumination is required throughout the entire means of egress, including the exit discharge, and is required to be provided during all times that the building is occupied.

Normal illumination is required in addition to emergency lighting, although in some cases you may have a single light source functioning in both capacities.

The minimum required level of illumination is 1 ft candle at the floor level along the entire means of egress. However, auditoriums, theaters, and other similar occupancies may reduce the illumination level to not less than .2 ft candle during performances as long as the illumination is automatically restored upon activation of the fire alarm system (if provided).

Artificial vs. natural light?

Some buildings have been designed with a lot of windows, thus allowing a significant amount of natural illumination. However, we must keep in mind that the amount of natural illumination cannot be controlled. On overly cloudy or stormy days, or even for facilities that operate during evening hours, natural lighting would not be sufficient. Therefore, all facilities must have enough artificial lighting to meet the normal illumination requirements.

Protecting the Switch

The 2006 International Fire Code is very clear that illumination must be provided during all times that the building is occupied. It does not say "during all times that the means of egress is occupied". A simple light switch may not be appropriate due to the ability to easily turn it off. Facilities must come up with a way to protect the lights from being inadvertently or purposely turned off.

The following options would be acceptable to the Office of the State Fire Marshal *

- Keyed switch
- Switch cover
- Hard-wired (no switch)

* Federal healthcare facilities are not allowed to have "task lighting" on a switch or keyed switch of any kind. Task lighting, which includes normal and emergency lights, must be hard-wired to stay on at all times.

Motion-sensor Lights

We understand that facilities are trying to cut costs and often times would like to turn off any lights that are not currently in use. An acceptable alternative would be the installation of motion-sensor light units. Motion-sensor lights would provide lighting in any area where motion is detected, therefore would meet the intention of the code requirement to provide lighting for safe navigation during all times that the building is occupied.