



FIRE DOORS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

Buildings are compartmented to delay the spread of fire from one area to another. These compartments are linked by fire doors to allow the flow of traffic around the building. Fire doors are one of the most overlooked parts of a buildings passive fire safety measures. Any fire door is considered a weak point in a fire compartment and as such it is vital to ensure that it is correctly maintained to protect the integrity of the compartment barrier. Fire doors fulfil two main functions. When closed they prevent the passage of heat and smoke thereby preventing fire spread, when open they act as a means of escape.

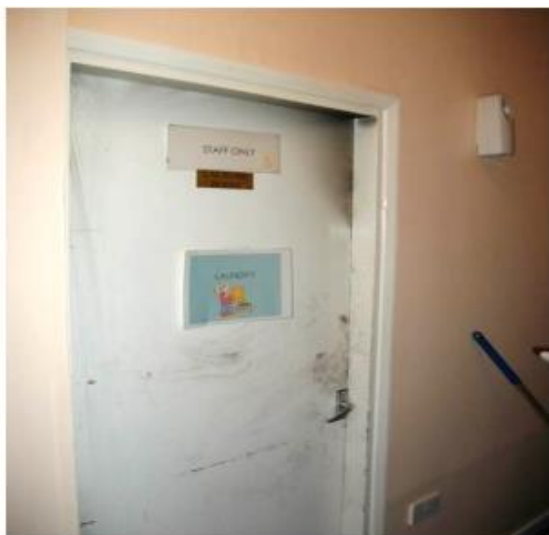
Fire alarms, emergency lighting and fire extinguishers are fitted as fire safety measures and fulfil specific purposes. The problem with fire doors is that they are often fulfilling the role of every day doors. As such people become used to seeing and using them and often do not associate them with part of the buildings fire safety strategy. Fire doors are subject to the day to day wear and tear of opening and closing as people pass through them and can be affected by changes to the building and the surrounding environment.

A fire door consists of many components designed to work together to hold back the passage of smoke and flame for a set period, usually between 30 minutes and one hour to allow for the occupants to escape and the Fire Service to access the premises. A regular maintenance programme does not have to cost a great deal but a poorly maintained fire door could potentially result in the loss of a complete building, a life or a business. A fire door is not just the door leaf; it is the complete assembly comprising the frame, any glazing, the intumescent fire and smoke seals and all ironmongery such as hinges, closers, latches and locks. Other ironmongery may be fitted for specific purposes such as viewers, letter plates, hold open devices etc. These must also be correctly rated and installed in accordance with the door manufacturer's instructions.



*This fire door (closed at the time of fire) has held back the passage of heat and smoke.
The room to the right was the fire room and the door had been wedged open!*





This fire door successfully held back a well developed fire until the arrival of the Fire Service

In existing buildings the requirement to test and maintain fire doors is governed by The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and will form part of your risk assessment. As with any other fire safety measure a fire door should be checked regularly to ensure it functions correctly and is ready to use. It should be part of your routine fire safety checks in exactly the same way as the fire alarm or fire extinguishers. Ideally, they should be tested monthly or more frequently depending on the traffic using the door. Properly specified and installed fire doors should carry a label showing their conformity. If there is no label present can you guarantee that it is in fact a fire door and be able to hold back a fire for the specified period of time?

If you are in any doubt the British Woodworking Federation (BWF) www.bwfcertifire.org.uk have a simple checklist which is free to download. Article 18 of the Fire Safety Order requires the responsible person to appoint one or more competent persons to assist in undertaking the preventive and protective measures. As with any fire safety measure no person should undertake any modifications or alterations to a fire door unless they are competent to do so. Both the BWF and the Fire Door Inspection Scheme (FDIS) www.fdis.co.uk can advise on competencies required to work on fire doors.

On a cost benefit basis, fire doors are one of the most beneficial fire safety measures installed in a building but are one of the most overlooked. You should be able to satisfy yourself that in the event of a fire your doors will perform as designed. They will not only prevent fire spread but will significantly reduce your losses and minimise any down time before repairs can be undertaken and a building reoccupied.



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