

Emergency Lighting and Exit Sign Testing

Emergency lighting provides two safeguards for a building in the event of a 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 shutdown 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 International Fire Code requires that emergency lighting units be able to provide illumination for 1½ hours after a power failure, and at a level sufficiently bright enough to allow people to see their way to exits, or to safely shut down processes and machinery, etc.

Testing of required emergency lighting systems shall be conducted as follows:

1. Functional testing shall be conducted monthly with a minimum of 3 weeks and a maximum of 5 weeks between tests, for not less than 30 seconds
 - a. 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.
2. Functional testing shall be conducted annually for a minimum of 1½ hours if the emergency lighting system is battery powered.
 - a. 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 1½ hours, or it should be serviced or replaced.
3. Written records of visual inspections and tests shall be kept by the owner for inspection by the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ).
 - a. 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 test’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.

Contact the Fire Prevention Bureau at (760) 723-2010 for any questions regarding testing.

