

Comprehensive Guide to Emergency Exit Signs - Types, Compliance and Safety

Emergency exit signs are a critical component of building safety systems, guiding occupants to exits during fires or other emergencies.

In this guide, you'll learn how to stay compliant and safe with emergency exit signs:

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- [Legal Requirements](#)
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Common Locations Requiring Exit Signs

Building codes and safety regulations mandate the use of exit signs in most non-residential and multi-occupancy structures.

Reminder: Every public corridor, stairwell, or exit path must clearly show how to exit the building - even during a power failure.

Exit signs aren't usually required for very small or simple spaces. **Code exceptions often allow omission of exit signs in:**

- *Low-occupant spaces:* Small rooms or buildings with an occupant load of 50 or fewer.
- *Single-exit rooms or obvious exits:* If a space has only one exit and it is readily apparent.

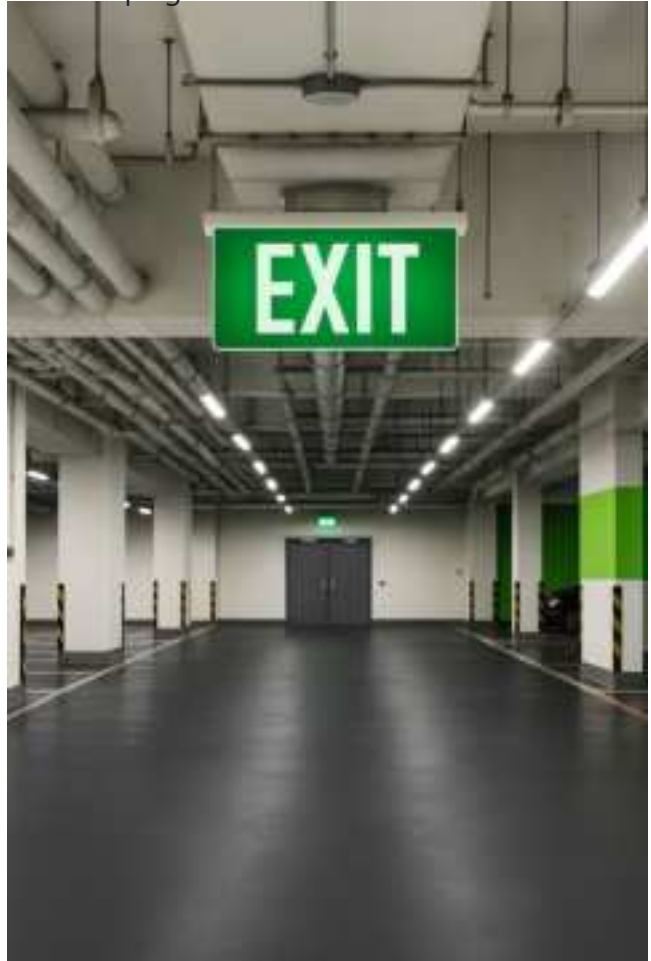
- *Certain residential areas:* Individual dwelling units or sleeping rooms.

However, any area in a public or commercial building where an exit or exit route is not immediately obvious must have signage.

Understanding Legal Requirements for Exit Signs

Exit signs must meet a range of **legal requirements** set by standards like OSHA, NFPA 101 (Life Safety Code), and the IBC.

- **Illumination and power supply:** Must be lit at all times, including during power failure.
- **Brightness and contrast:** OSHA mandates a surface value of at least 5 foot-candles.
- **Lettering size and style:** Letters must be at least 6 inches high.
- **Placement and visibility:** Signs must be visible from any direction of travel.
- **Continuous operation and testing:** Must be UL 924 listed.



Quick Fact: UL 924 is the standard that guarantees exit signs meet critical emergency lighting requirements.

Inspection and Maintenance of Exit Signs

Regular inspection and testing is required.

- **Monthly functional tests:** Each sign should be tested for at least 30 seconds every 30 days.
- **Annual full-duration test:** Run for 90 minutes to confirm battery capacity.
- **Visual inspections:** Check for burned-out bulbs or obstructions.
- **Recordkeeping:** Maintain written records of tests and maintenance.

Tip: Use self-testing exit signs to automate inspections and reduce maintenance time.

Modern [self-testing exit signs](#) automate monthly checks.

Types of Exit Sign Fixtures

- **LED Exit Signs:** Long-lasting and efficient. [Browse options.](#)
- **Photoluminescent Signs:** Glow-in-the-dark and no electricity required.
- **Tritium Signs:** Self-luminous; no wiring. Handle disposal with care.
- **Edge-Lit Signs:** Sleek appearance with LED edge lighting.
- **Steel Exit Signs:** Rugged and durable. [View steel models.](#)
- **Wet & Hazardous Location Signs:** Rated for challenging environments. [Explore hazardous-rated signs.](#)
- **Combo Units:** Dual emergency lights and signage.



Why Combo Units? Combo signs combine illumination and exit direction in one fixture â€” ideal for space-conscious applications.

Local Code Variations & Approvals

Some cities enforce stricter signage rules. NYC and Chicago have specific size, color, and technology requirements.

Additional Considerations

- **Power source availability:** Match the sign type to wiring or lighting access.
- **Location:** Ensure suitability for damp or outdoor environments.

- **Aesthetics:** Consider edge-lit or aluminum for design-forward installs.
- **Cost & Maintenance:** LED and self-testing units reduce long-term expenses.
- **Emergency Systems:** Match sign power source to backup systems.

Summary

Emergency exit signs are vital safety components that must meet visibility, durability, and testing standards. Explore [our full selection of exit signs](#), including [battery backup](#), [self-testing](#), [steel](#), and [hazardous location-rated](#) models.