

Classroom Fire Safety for Teachers

This information sheet summarizes common provisions from the 2015 Minnesota State Fire Code (MSFC) relating to elementary and secondary school classrooms. For comprehensive information regarding educational occupancies, see our [Educational Occupancy Information Sheet](#).

Means of egress

- **Aisles and aisle accessways in classrooms**
 - **Aisles** are pathways leading to an exit doorway.
 - **Aisle accessways** are pathways that lead to an aisle. For example, the pathways between rows of desks or tables are aisle accessways.
 - Although minimum aisle and aisle accessway widths for classrooms can vary depending on specific seating arrangements, the following will apply to most classrooms having fewer than 50 occupants:
 - Aisle accessways between desks or tables shall be at least 24 inches wide.
 - Aisles leading to classroom exit doorways shall be at least 36 inches wide.
 - Aisles and aisle accessways will have no obstructions or impediments.

- **Exit doors from classrooms**
 - Number of exits
 - Classrooms with an occupant load of 50+ must have two exit access doorways.
 - Standard-use classrooms typically do not require a second exit unless 1,000 square feet or more in area.
 - Vocational shops, band and orchestra rooms typically do not require a second exit unless 2,500 square feet or more in area.
 - School laboratories storing and/or utilizing hazardous materials:
 - Newly constructed labs exceeding 500 square feet must be provided with two remotely located exit doorways.
 - Existing labs exceeding 1,000 square feet must be provided with two remotely located exit doorways.
 - Access and visibility
 - Required exit doors must be maintained free from obstructions or impediments to full instant use.
 - Exit doors must be distinguishable from the adjacent construction and finishes and cannot be concealed or made unrecognizable.
 - Exit signs must be clearly visible and cannot be obstructed or otherwise concealed.



- Door hardware
 - Exit door hardware must both unlock and unlatch the door *with a single operation* without the use of key, tools, special knowledge or effort. Door security or barricade devices not in compliance with the MSFC are prohibited. See our [Classroom Security and Barricade Devices](#) information sheet for more information.

- **Holding open classroom doors**

- Classroom doors leading directly to a fire-rated egress corridor must be maintained self-closing and latching in order to protect the egress system in case of fire. Thus, such doors cannot be held open for extended periods of time unless controlled by an approved door-hold system that releases the door upon smoke detection.
 - School corridors serving more than 30 occupants are required to be fire-rated unless:
 - The building is protected throughout with a fire sprinkler system, or
 - The corridors are protected throughout with smoke detection devices connected to the building's fire alarm system.

Although rare, it is possible for a classroom door to be part of a required fire area separation wall. This may be the case if your classroom door shows a fire-rating greater than 20 minutes. When in doubt, contact your assigned State Fire Marshal school inspector for guidance.

- **Storage of personal effects in egress corridors**

- Personal effects such as jackets, shoes, boots, backpacks, etc., shall not be stored in non-sprinkler-protected corridors or lobbies unless enclosed within metal lockers.
- Personal effects shall not be located within the required width of a corridor or pose an obstruction or impediment to egress. Loose items not secured by racks, cubbies or similar storage systems may be considered a potential egress obstruction or impediment.

- **Desks and work stations in egress corridors**

- Desks, tables and chairs, and similar work stations in corridors must be located in an alcove or similar area outside the minimum required egress width of corridors.

Combustible artwork, teaching materials and decorative items

- **Combustible art and teaching materials on walls**

- Combustible art, teaching materials and similar coverings applied to corridor walls are limited to 20 percent of the wall area in buildings without fire sprinkler protection. Up to 50 percent coverage is permitted in sprinkler-protected buildings.
- Combustible art and teaching materials applied to classroom walls do not have a defined limit, however when significant quantities of highly combustible materials are applied to walls or ceilings, the fire code official may limit quantities or require an approved fire-retardant treatment when such materials pose a fire hazard.

- **Decorative displays**

- Decorative displays using significant quantities of highly flammable materials such as foam plastics, textiles or dried vegetation are prohibited unless documented to have passed an appropriate fire propagation test or treated as flame-retardant.

- **Items suspended from ceilings**

- Items suspended from ceilings such as banners, flags, sculptures, etc. must not obstruct the spray pattern of fire sprinkler heads. Typically, items located within 18 inches of sprinkler head deflectors are considered obstructions. However, relatively small or lightweight decorations such as paper snowflakes, mobiles, etc. would not be considered obstructions in most cases.

Electrical

- **Extension cords**

- Extension cords must comply with the following:
 - Shall not be used as a substitute for permanent wiring, but may be used temporarily with portable appliances.
 - Shall not be affixed to the structure or extended through walls, ceilings, floors or doorways.
 - Shall not be placed under floor coverings or in any location subject to environmental or physical damage.
 - Shall not serve more than one appliance unless using an approved multi-plug extension cord.
 - The ampacity of the extension cord shall not be less than what's required for the attached electrical load.
 - Shall be grounded when serving grounded appliances.
 - Shall be in good condition and without damage.

- **Relocatable power-taps**

- Relocatable power-taps (i.e. power-strips with flexible cords) must comply with the following:
 - Listed by a nationally recognized testing laboratory to UL 1363.
 - Equipped with overcurrent protection (this is not the same as surge-suppression).
 - Polarized and grounded.
 - Plugged directly into a permanently installed electrical receptacle.
 - Power-taps cannot receive power from another power-tap or extension cord.
 - Must not be overloaded beyond the rated capacity.

- **Multi-plug adapters**

- Multi-plug current taps and adapters listed to UL 498A are approved for use when plugged directly into a permanently installed electrical receptacle.
- Such devices must be utilized in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and shall not be overloaded beyond the rated capacity.

- **Appliances**

- Electrical appliances must be listed by a nationally recognized testing laboratory (e.g. UL, ETL, CSA, etc.) and installed and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

We recommend checking with your school district, as they may have their own policy regarding the use of specific electrical appliances in classrooms.

- Electric space heaters
 - Must be listed by a nationally recognized testing laboratory and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
 - Most heaters will require at least 3 feet of clearance from combustibles and cannot be operated in areas where flammable vapors may be present or where flammable/combustible liquids are stored.
 - Ceramic or oil-filled type heaters are recommended over resistance-type heaters having exposed heating elements.
 - Must be plugged directly into a permanently installed electrical receptacle without the use of an extension cord.

Ceramic Kilns

- Kilns must be listed by a nationally recognized testing laboratory and installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and the Minnesota Mechanical Code.
 - The manufacturer's instructions will specify the minimum installation clearances from walls and ceilings, minimum room size, etc.
 - Combustible items must be located at least 36 inches away from kilns.
 - Kilns must be vented in accordance with the manufacturer's installation instructions.

For new installations most kilns will require a mechanical exhaust system as certain materials and glazes may produce irritating or toxic vapors when fired.

Storage

- **Storage height in areas protected with fire sprinklers**

- Storage must be located at least 18 inches below the level of sprinkler head deflectors.

This clearance is necessary in order to allow the sprinkler spray pattern to develop for proper coverage. The 18 inch height restriction does not apply to storage located along walls around the room's perimeter unless sprinkler heads are located directly above the storage.

- **Storage height in areas without fire sprinklers**

- Storage must be located at least 24 inches below the ceiling.

The 24 inch height restriction does not apply to storage located along walls around the room's perimeter. It is not uncommon for a room to be too hot to enter during fire conditions. Because temperatures are highest at ceiling level, firefighters will often direct a water stream across the ceiling in order to rapidly cool the room for safe entry.

- **Storage arrangements**

- Storage shall be orderly to protect firefighters during emergency operations. Minimum 24 inch access aisles shall be maintained in storage areas.

Fire Protection Features

- **Portable fire extinguishers**

- A minimum rated 2A:10B:C fire extinguisher must be located within 75 feet travel distance from any point in a classroom. Extinguishers may be located within the classroom or within the adjacent corridor as long as the travel distance to the extinguisher does not exceed 75 feet.
 - In fully sprinklered buildings, schools have the option of placing 'general use' extinguishers in non-student-accessible areas such as storage, mechanical and utility rooms. If you do not know the location of the nearest fire extinguisher, contact your school's maintenance manager.
- Fire extinguishers must be mounted or housed within an approved cabinet, no higher than 5 feet above floor level as measured from the top of the extinguisher.
- Science labs containing hazardous materials must be provided with a minimum rated 2A:20B:C fire extinguisher.

- **Obstruction of fire protection devices**

- Fire protection devices such as sprinkler heads or fire alarm detection and initiating devices (e.g. pull stations, smoke or heat detectors, and horn/strobe units) must not be covered or otherwise obstructed or concealed.
- Fire sprinkler heads must not be obstructed or covered.
- Objects shall not be suspended from or supported by fire sprinkler heads or piping systems.

Fire Evacuation Procedures

- Upon fire alarm system activation, follow your school's fire emergency and evacuation procedures.
- Ensure the classroom door is closed and latched after all occupants have left the room.
- After reaching your classroom's assigned assembly point, ensure all students are accounted for.