

Safety Notice about Storage in Exit Pathways

Storage in exit pathways, including corridors, stairwells, entrances, and passageways is typically not permitted. It may seem convenient to temporarily store boxes, furniture and equipment during office relocation or renovation, but it can create serious safety hazards because these areas are our principal paths of escape in emergency situations.

Corridors, stair enclosures and hallways are not assigned to departments and administrative units; any use must not adversely affect safety or put the university at risk of regulatory action or litigation. These areas are for egress only and must remain free of hazardous materials, equipment, storage, and other materials and debris to assure safety in normal use. Access to and visibility of safety equipment, lighting, exit and other signs must also remain unobstructed at all times, as required by the MA Comprehensive Fire Safety Code 527 CMR 1.

Building occupants, of all abilities, must have clear exit pathways or routes and enough space to evacuate a building in an emergency. The Life Safety Code (NFPA 101) requires a minimum width for exit pathways and any portion of a building that is open to the public or has employees who are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is required to have exit access of at least 36 inches; the minimum clear width for doors is 32 inches.

The Life Safety Code also requires that exit routes not decrease in width going toward the exit. Exit routes may not be used for any purpose other than an exit, may not be obstructed by any means, and any objects that project into an exit route may not reduce the width of the exit route to less than its minimum required width.

When items are stored in corridors, they often will be placed along the wall; however, important safety devices such as fire extinguishers, automated external defibrillator (AED) wall mounted units, some escape masks, and fire alarm pull stations, are often mounted on walls. Access to safety devices must not be obstructed by improperly stored or placed items.

Important signage that shows exits and evacuation routes, as well as braille exit and staging area signage, must also be clear of improperly stored items. Blocking such signage may prevent individuals with disabilities from safely evacuating the building. Similarly, persons who use a wheelchair may be hindered by storage in the halls. We are all responsible to make sure exit routes are kept clear to allow safe and swift evacuations.

In general, the following restrictions apply to all corridors and stair enclosures:

- No storage is allowed in corridors of buildings not equipped with automatic sprinklers.
- No storage is permitted within 24-inches of a ceiling in a non-sprinklered building.
- No storage is permitted to within 18-inches of a sprinkler.
- No storage is allowed within a stairway or stair enclosure.
- Nothing may obstruct the required minimum width of a corridor.

- Nothing that could be easily dislodged or tipped over should be stored in a corridor.

Contact us at ehs@wellesley.edu to seek support if items can be placed in an egress pathway.

Upon notice from the EHS Office and Fire Safety Officer, unauthorized items shall be removed promptly, within the following time frame:

- Immediately, if material is hazardous (compressed gases, hazardous chemicals, etc.)
- Within 30 days if the item is non-hazardous