

# Safety in Places of Public Assembly

Every day, millions of people wake up, go to work or school, and take part in social events. But every so often the unexpected happens: an earthquake, a fire, a chemical spill, an act of terrorism or some other disaster. Routines change drastically, and people are suddenly aware of how fragile their lives and routines can be. Each disaster can have lasting effects — people may be seriously injured or killed, and devastating and costly property damage can occur. People entering any public assembly building need to be prepared in case of an emergency.

## BEFORE YOU ENTER

- **Take a good look.** Does the building appear to be in a condition that makes you feel comfortable? Is the main entrance wide and does it open outward to allow easy exit? Is the outside area clear of materials stored against the building or blocking exits?
- **Have a communication plan.** Identify a relative or friend to contact in case of emergency and you are separated from family or friends.
- **Plan a meeting place.** Pick a meeting place outside to meet family or friends with whom you are attending the function. If there is an emergency, be sure to meet them there.

## WHEN YOU ENTER

- **Take a good look.** Locate exits immediately. When you enter a building you should look for all available exits. Some exits may be in front and some in back of you. Be prepared to use your closest exit. You may not be able to use the main exit.
- **Check for clear exit paths.** Make sure aisles are wide enough and not obstructed by chairs or furniture. Check to make sure your exit door is not blocked or chained. If there are not at least two exits or exit paths are blocked, report the violation to management and leave the building if it is not immediately addressed. Call the local fire marshal to register a complaint.
- **Do you feel safe?** Does the building appear to be overcrowded? Are there fire sources such as candles burning, cigarettes or cigars burning, pyrotechnics, or other heat sources that may make you feel unsafe? Are there safety systems in place such as alternative exits, sprinklers, and smoke alarms? Ask the management for clarification on your concerns. If you do not feel safe in the building, leave immediately.

## DURING AN EMERGENCY

**React immediately.** If an alarm sounds, you see smoke or fire, or some other unusual disturbance immediately exit the building in an orderly fashion.

**Get out, stay out!** Once you have escaped, stay out. Under no circumstances should you ever go back into a burning building. Let trained firefighters conduct rescue operations.

## FACT

A fire at The Station nightclub in W. Warwick, RI, on February 20, 2003, claimed 100 lives and is the fourth-deadliest nightclub fire in U.S. history. Since that fire, NFPA has enacted tough new code provisions for fire sprinklers and crowd management in nightclub-type venues. Those provisions mark sweeping changes to the codes and standards governing safety in assembly occupancies.



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