

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 269: 1918 (NUMBER OF EXIT/TRAVEL DISTANCE REQUIREMENTS)

By Richard Schulte

The twenty-second Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association was held in Chicago in May 1918. Among the reports presented at this meeting was the Report of Committee on Safety to Life. A portion of this report addressed the number of exits required and travel distance limitations. The following is an excerpt of the Report addressing these two components of egress system design:

“Number and Character of Exits.

24. Two means of exit remote from each other must be provided from every building or section. Above the second floor, one of these must be an inside stairway or a smoke-proof tower, and the other may be an inside stairway or a smoke-proof tower or a horizontal exit or an outside stairway, except that where a building or section has horizontal exits to two or more buildings or sections, in or through each of which access may be had to an inside stairway or a smoke-proof tower, no inside stair, smoke-proof tower, or outside stairway need be provided.

25. Exits shall be so arranged with regard to floors that there are no pockets or dead ends of appreciable size in which persons might be trapped.

26. Doors giving access to means of egress must swing with the travel or slide across the travel, and there shall be no obstructions to stairs or on stairs or on landings; provided, also, that swinging doors during their swing shall preferably not reduce the effective width of the stairs or landings, and that swinging doors when open shall not interfere with the full use of stairs.

27. The distance from any point where a person may work to the nearest available exit shall not exceed:

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| <i>a. High hazard occupancy</i> | <i>75 feet.</i> |
| <i>b. Moderate hazard occupancy</i> | <i>100 feet.</i> |
| <i>c. Low hazard occupancy</i> | <i>150 feet.”</i> |

The maximum travel distance limitations proposed in 1918 were far more restrictive than the travel distance limitations included in modern codes, however, it should be noted that the distance limitations indicated above were measured along a straight line between any point and the nearest exit, rather than measured along the actual path of travel from any point to the nearest exit.

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Source: *“Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual [NFPA] Meeting”*, Chicago, Illinois, 1918.

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Richard C. Schulte