

DOS & DON'TS: Don't Lock Workers Inside the Workplace



- ☒ Employers have a duty to protect workers from violence and may do so by, say, locking doors to the workplace so that outsiders can't get inside without being buzzed in or going through security. But although there are reasons for securing the workplace so unauthorized people can't get *in*, there's no justification for locking doors so that workers can't get *out*. In fact, doing so is dangerous and can put workers at risk—especially in an emergency, such as a fire. (And blocking emergency exits, such as by storing materials in front of them, is just as dangerous.)

Here are just a few examples of situations in which locked doors prevented workers from escaping in an emergency:

- More than 100 people died in a recent fire at a Chinese poultry plant. Many workers died because emergency exits were blocked and other exits were locked.
- A fire broke out in a garment factory in Bangladesh. More workers would've survived, said investigators, if the factory's sole emergency exit wasn't locked.
- In another Bangladesh garment factory fire, at least 110 workers died and about 200 others were injured. A fire official said the death toll would've been much lower had there been even one functioning emergency exit to prevent workers from becoming trapped. It didn't help that the main doors may have been padlocked shut. As a result, some of the victims died after jumping from the

burning structure.

- Before you assume that locking in workers is only an issue overseas, [The Sam's Club](#), a Wal-Mart subsidiary, routinely locked overnight staff inside its US stores, ostensibly to protect them from robbers and deter employee theft. When a worker injured his ankle at 3:00 a.m., he couldn't just leave to get medical attention. Another worker tried to reach a manager, who were the only ones with keys, and it took an hour for someone to get there and unlock the door.