Spot The Safety Violation: Don't Try to Escape Through Here

In a fire or other emergency, what's the likelihood that workers would be able to get out of this door in time to avoid injury'or worse'

The OHS laws require employers to plan for a wide-variety of workplace emergencies, including fires, explosions, serious safety incidents and extreme weather conditions, such as tornadoes and hurricanes. One thing that employers must do to fulfill those requirements is ensure that workers can safely get out of the workplace in the event of an emergency, such as by keeping exits clear of obstructions.

Blocking worker access to exits'emergency or otherwise'can prevent workers from escaping, trap them inside and seriously endanger their lives.

It's easy to assume that you'll never really need to use emergency exits and so treat these areas as additional storage locations.

But look what can happen when people *do* need to use exits and can't:

- When a fire broke out in a nightclub in Brazil, bouncers initially blocked the only exit, thinking people were trying to leave without paying their tabs. As a result, people got trapped inside and more than 200 died.
- A fire in a garment factory in Bangladesh resulted in the deaths of seven workers. The factory's sole emergency exit was allegedly locked.
- In another Bangladesh factory fire, at least 110 workers died and about 200 were injured in part because the building lacked fire exits and the main doors may have been padlocked shut.
- And here in Canada, workers in an Ontario wrecking yard were forced to run to the other end of the building to escape a fire because the emergency exit was blocked. They suffered burns and smoke inhalation. Their employer was fined $60,000 for, among other things, failing to ensure that emergency exits were free from obstructions [*Woodstock Auto Recyclers Ltd.*, Govt. News Release, April 26, 2012].

Keeping exits clear of obstructions is just one of the things you must do to protect your workers in the event of fires and other emergencies.