Spot The Safety Violation: Get Me a Pry Bar!



If a fire, explosion or other emergency occurred in this workplace, how exactly would workers be able to exit through this door'

Employers must plan for a various emergencies, including fires, explosions, extreme weather conditions and workplace violence, such as active shooter incidents. A critical part of emergency planning is ensuring that workers can safely get out of the workplace if there's an emergency within it.

For instance, this photograph from the US Naval Safety Center shows an exit in a thrift store that's essentially been rendered impossible to use. After all, in an emergency, workers probably wouldn't have time to pry off the boards blocking this exit door.

Fortunately, emergencies are rare. But when they *do* happen, blocking access to exits'emergency or otherwise'can prevent workers from escaping, trap them inside and seriously endanger their lives:

- In the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City in 1911, 146 female workers died, in part, because some exits were locked to prevent workers from stealing.
- 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 partly because the building lacked fire exits and the main doors may have been padlocked shut.
- In Ontario, workers in a 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].

Providing accessible exits is just one of the things you must do to protect your workers in the event of fires and other emergencies. The OHS Insider has additional information, tools and resources to help your emergency planning, including:

- 8 emergency preparedness and response tips
- A fire extinguisher inspection checklist
- Information on complying with the fire preparedness requirements in the OHS laws
- A fire safety assessment form
- A fire safety checklist for industrial workplaces
- A fire safety checklist for offices.