



Coffee Break Training - Fire Protection Series

Means of Egress: Aisles and Accessways Serving Table Seating

No. FP-2012-47 November 20, 2012

Learning Objective: The student shall be able to describe the aisle spacing requirements in assembly occupancies where tables and chairs are arranged.

Large public venues where table seating is provided create a particular challenge for code officials because the table arrangement is subject to frequent change. Fortunately, code officials have the authority to require pre-event seating plans, so they can study the proposed layout and correct problems before they occur.

When studying these layouts, it is important to distinguish the difference between the “aisle accessway” and the “aisle.” An “aisle accessway” is the portion of an exit access that leads to an aisle. The “aisle” defines and provides an unobstructed path of egress travel. (See Coffee Break Training 2005-2 for a description of the exit access.)

The required clear width of an aisle accessway should be not less than 12 inches (305 millimeters (mm)). There is an exception if the aisle accessway serves not more than four persons and does not exceed 6 feet (1,830 mm) in length to an aisle; in that specific case, no minimum clear width is required.

Where moveable seating is located between a table and an aisle accessway or aisle, the measurement of required clear width should be made to a line 19 inches (485 mm) perpendicular to the edge of the table. The 19-inch (485-mm) dimension is intended to accommodate a patron pushing his or her chair back from the table, leaving a clear aisle accessway between chairs.

The minimum required clear width of an aisle accessway should be increased beyond the 12-inch (305-mm) requirement by 1/2 inch (13 mm) for each additional 12 inches (305 mm) or fraction thereof beyond 12 feet (3,660 mm) of aisle accessway length. This measurement is taken from the center of the seat farthest from an aisle. The path of travel along the aisle accessway should not exceed 36 feet (11 meters (m)) from any seat to the closest aisle or egress doorway.

The width of “aisles” serving table seating should be not less than 36 inches (915 mm) where serving an occupant load of 50 or fewer and 44 inches (1,120 mm) where serving an occupant load exceeding 50.

For additional information, refer to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 101, *Life Safety Code*[™]; NFPA 1, *Fire Code*, Chapter 20; or *International Fire Code*[®], Chapter 10.



Table seating must be provided with accessways and aisles to maintain a continuous means of egress to an exit. Here, aisle accessways at least 12 inches (305 mm) wide should be provided.



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