

When do I need a 'Refuge Area'?



We are frequently asked this question and hope that the information below helps. (The relevant documents should be consulted for full definition and information.)

BS5839-9:2011 - Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings

Part 9: Code of practice for design, installation, commissioning and maintenance of emergency voice communication systems.

"Need for an emergency voice communication system"

COMMENTARY ON CLAUSE 4

An EVC system enables communication between strategic points throughout the building or site and the central control point(s). EVC systems are generally needed in the following situations:

- In any building or sports or similar venues where there are disabled people or people who may have difficulty negotiating the evacuation route.
- In buildings with phased evacuation and/or firefighting lifts where it facilitates secure communications for building managers, fire wardens and attending fire officers.

NOTE Installation of an EVC system might be appropriate for buildings without phased evacuation where the types, size and/or shape of the building necessitates communication between remote locations and a central control point, to facilitate evacuation or firefighting.

- At sports venues and in similar complexes, where it will assist stewards in controlling the evacuation of the area in an emergency. In some buildings it might be necessary to take into consideration that the EVC system will address multiple uses and the outstation design will reflect its intended use.

The need for EVC in any specific building or complex will normally be determined by the appropriate regulation and/or a fire risk assessment carried out by the owner, landlord, occupier(s), employer(s) or other responsible person, as appropriate.

The following should be consulted when determining the type and function of an EVC system:

- Approved Document B (Fire safety) Volume 2: Buildings other than dwelling houses; ([see right](#))
- BS 9999; ([see right](#))
- Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds, Fifth edition, 2008; ([see right](#))
- Fire Safety Guide No 3, Phased Evacuation from Office Buildings. London District Surveyors Association;
- Guidance documents that support fire safety legislation;
- Any authority responsible for enforcing fire safety legislation that applies to the premises."

“Section 4: Design for vertical escape buildings other than dwelling houses”

4.1 An important aspect of means of escape in multi-storey buildings is the availability of a sufficient number of adequately sized and protected escape stairs. ...[text]

[text].... most people should be able independently to reach the safety of a protected escape route or final exit. However, some people, for example those who use wheelchairs, may not be able to use stairways without assistance. For them evacuation involving the use of refuges on escape routes [and assistance]..... will be necessary.”

BS9999:2008

“Disabled people can be at particular risk in the event of a fire and need appropriate protection facilities. These might include relevant provisions for those requiring assistance, such as: ...[text] evacuation lifts or protected refuge areas and devices for taking people down or up stairs.”

“Attention is drawn to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which places duties on all employers and providers of services not to discriminate against disabled people, and to make adjustments to their policies, practices, procedures or physical features of their premises, to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against..[text]... It is vital to ensure therefore, when making plans for the fire safety and management of buildings, that the requirements of disabled people are properly taken into account at all times.”

“The preferred method of evacuation for disabled people is by horizontal evacuation to the outside of the building or another fire compartment or by evacuation lift. If these are not available or not in operation, then it might be necessary to carry a person with limited mobility up or down the escape stair. Means of escape for disabled people may comprise a combination of structural provisions (e.g. lifts, refuge areas and ramps)...”

“The use of refuges within a building can be of great advantage in the evacuation of disabled people as it enables their escape to be managed in a way that does not hinder that of other users of the building.”

“Fifth edition”

10.12 Management of evacuation of spectators with disabilities

b. Refuges

Designers and management should provide refuges of a suitable size to accommodate known numbers of wheelchair users and to plan for their subsequent evacuation by means of suitable lifts or management procedures.”



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