

ESCAPE ROOMS

Escape Rooms seem to be popular now. What are the safety requirements for an “Escape Room”?

A quick search on the internet shows that “Escape” type rooms are very popular. The safety aspect of these types of businesses was brought to the forefront when five teenage girls were killed during a fire in an “Escape Room” in Poland in January of 2019. In Alberta, safety within a building is regulated by the National Building Code – 2019 Alberta Edition (NBC(AE)) and the National Fire Code – 2019 Alberta Edition (NFC (AE)). As in any type of occupancies/businesses the NBC(AE) does not specifically address the requirements for the individual business, but generally speaks to what is required in a building depending on the size and classification.

The information contained within this document was obtained from the NBC(AE), the NFC(AE) and various websites of “escape room” businesses or groups, who are highlighting safety requirements for these types of activities.

Research has indicated that there are/were four types of “escape rooms”, including:

- locked in - with no emergency exit
- locked in – with an emergency key held and used by one of the staff
- locked in – doors locked with magnetic locking mechanisms
- not locked in - as the escape room industry diversifies, this is becoming increasingly common

Municipalities should review the option(s) presented and consult the NBC(AE) and NFC(AE) to assess whether the option presented is viable.

NBC(AE) and NFC(AE) Requirements

The following is a general list of code requirements and may not include all of the requirements. For specific code references or interpretations please consult with the local Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ):

- occupancy classification will be as per the NBC(AE)
- travel distance requirements to an exit is dependent on the occupancy classification of the building



SAFETY TIPS

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- doors in an access to exit shall be readily openable in travelling to an exit without requiring keys, special devices or specialized knowledge of the door opening mechanism, except that this requirement does not apply to a door serving a contained use area, or an impeded egress zone
- electromagnetic locks may be installed with a fire alarm system that must automatically release when the fire alarm system is activated
- if a building is required to have a fire alarm system installed, then a manual station shall be installed near every exit
- if a building is required to have a fire alarm system it shall be inspected, tested and maintained
- emergency lights shall be installed, inspected, tested and maintained
- exit lights may be required depending on the size and the number of occupants
- fire extinguishers shall be installed, inspected, tested and maintained
- exits and means of egress shall be maintained and unobstructed
- access to fire safety equipment shall be maintained
- a fire safety plan including fire emergency procedures shall be required
- staff shall be trained in the fire emergency procedures described in the fire safety plan

Industry Best Practices

The information provided below was gathered from numerous websites from those in the industry who believe that safety is a component of a successful experience in their “escape rooms”:

- escape rooms should have thorough camera and microphone coverage
- encourage escape room companies to have a dedicated gamemaster for each game
- the gamemaster should also have a method of rapidly communicating with the players
- participants are monitored by staff throughout and players are made aware they can take an exit door in the case of emergency
- players should be instructed that all emergency equipment is real, not part of the game and it should never be tampered with
- show players a clear path way to escape from the building before starting their escape room game adventure so they can escape the building in case of an emergency
- an escape room will be able to shut their entire facility down with the press of a button alerting the players that something is wrong, their attention is needed and it is not part of the game
- there should be enough staff on hand to reasonably address any emergencies
- no handcuffs or blindfolds should be used as it is dangerous for players in an emergency

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NOTE: It is recommended that these best practices be incorporated into the fire safety plan in consultation with a Fire Safety Codes Officer (Fire SCO). Please contact the local Authority Having Jurisdiction for any questions regarding this Safety Tip.

Contact

Community and Technical Support branch of Municipal Affairs:

Hours: 8:15 am to 4:30 pm (open Monday to Friday, closed statutory holidays)

Toll free: 1-866-421-6929

Email: safety.services@gov.ab.ca

Please contact your local Fire Department for any questions regarding this Safety Tip.