

The Everyday of Fire Door Safety

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Kirk Smith of [Allegion UK](#) reviews a dangerous inconsistency in fire safety, outlining why fire doors deserve the same respect as the other day to day items people use around their homes, work and places of leisure.

Whether it's boiling the kettle, charging your phone or changing a lightbulb, it's second nature to be cautious when handling a potentially dangerous object. The common appliances, technologies and commodities found around our homes and places of work can pose risks and from an early age we learn to identify these dangers. However, there's another everyday item that often gets overlooked and doesn't receive the same level of attention: fire doors.

Fire doors and their hardware are purpose built to prevent the spread of smoke and fire in an emergency and are a key element of any building's passive fire protection system. Though, despite their crucial role in safeguarding our lives, and the fact they are used just as frequently as many of the other everyday objects in our built environment, fire doors are all too often neglected, misused and poorly maintained.

Whilst individuals are likely to study the safety features of their personal products and learn how to correctly use them, why is this not the case for fire doors and their hardware? Kirk Smith of Allegion UK discusses this risky contradiction:

"Safety measures are an integral part of our lives, and many of us are vigilant when it comes to personal responsibility and how common items should be operated and looked after. As observant people, we review the condition of our charger wires, we blow out candles and matches when we're finished with them and we closely check product reviews for the appliances we buy, all to reduce the chance of faults and fire and the danger it presents to the buildings we reside in. And when a product doesn't perform as it should, we act.

"It would appear then that we live in a culture obsessed with functionality and safety, yet there is a

worrying knowledge gap when it comes to the world of fire door safety. Whether it's in our homes, places of work or public buildings, fire doors are used millions of times every day and are meticulously designed to serve as life-saving barriers, protecting property and people in the event of a fire. Though they play an ever present role in our day to day, many that walk through them fail to recognise the significance of a fully compliant fire door and what makes one effective at saving lives in an emergency.

"Fire doors are often the first line of defence against fire and smoke and maintaining their integrity is critical to us all. When closed, a certified fire door will typically compartmentalise a space for 30 to 60 minutes, preventing the spread of smoke and fire and providing occupants with an opportunity to escape. Conversely, an ineffective fire door system can fail within minutes, and an open one is considered useless in a fire. During the closing action, a fire door relies on its hardware, calling upon hinges, locks, latches and door closing devices to secure it firmly in place. In a fire situation, not one of these components can fail and as such, doorsets are rigorously tested to ensure they meet necessary standards, conforming to UKCA and CE certifications and FD ratings.

"We're not simply talking about a safety feature; fire doors are a legal requirement in all non-domestic premises and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). However, individuals are less inclined to check whether they meet the right condition or standards once installed. Perhaps it's a case of visibility, where a broken or exposed wire screams danger, a fire door simply blends into its surroundings until it is needed. Questions also remain over accountability and competence, with many unsure on the responsibilities associated with keeping fire door systems operational. Regardless, where building owners and designated responsible persons bear the legal responsibility for fire door compliance, everyone has a role to play in ensuring fire door safety."

Routine responsibilities can save lives

In many cases, improved awareness and communication towards fire door safety can help mitigate risk. As many maintain a level of scrutiny towards other everyday items, it's clear that a greater understanding is needed concerning fire door use and compliance. But what more can be done to ensure fire doors and their hardware receive the same level of attention and care as our other everyday belongings? Kirk Smith continues:

"The first step is about fostering and filling knowledge gaps. What does a compliant fire door look like? How should one operate? And what is its role in my building's fire safety strategy? Just because a fire door is visually present doesn't mean it will work, especially if it has been neglected, misused or its fitted with hardware lacking the correct certification – a fire door certified for domestic use may not be suitable in a high-traffic commercial setting, for example. The industry must look to bridge the gap by providing resources and support tools whilst reminding people that fire safety is a shared responsibility.

"Where the use of uncertified hardware can compromise the effectiveness of a fire door, it's also important to recognise that a building's fire doors will not perform as intended unless essential hardware has been correctly specified, installed and maintained. Routine maintenance checks are crucial, and responsible persons are urged to assess the certification, gaps, seals, hinges and closing elements on fire doors on a quarterly basis, ensuring they are maintained in an efficient state and in good working order.

"Though, in any circumstance, occupants should be encouraged to report damage and propped open fire doors. In higher risk buildings where many rely on shared fire safety systems, it's vital that people feel

comfortable to communicate concerns and, more importantly, know who they can turn to when a fire safety issue arises. Just as we wouldn't ignore the smell of gas or exposed live electrical wires on show, you shouldn't ignore a faulty or improperly used fire door. With this in mind, basic routine fire door safety practices can include:

- Keeping fire doors closed
- Locating fire door signage and recognising emergency escape routes
- Checking hardware and intumescent/smoke seals are in good working order
- Reporting damage on fire doors and their hardware

"Whether we recognise it or not, fire door safety is embedded into the way we live, work and play and it is wrong to overlook fire doors until we need them in an emergency. Instead, we must strive to create a culture, one that is centred around greater awareness, shared responsibility and competent action. Simply put, it's time to give fire doors the same attention as the items that entertain and convenience us.

The support that Allegion UK can provide

Allegion UK works closely with reputable bodies such as the GAI, BWF-FDA and DHF and as a conscious member of the supply chain is committed to supporting customers throughout product specification and the necessary installation and maintenance procedures thereafter. Allegion has a wealth of customer support resources, including its newly downloadable 'Fire Door Hardware Maintenance and Installation Logbook' which has been designed to address common issues in these areas whilst offering accessible installation guidance and comprehensive maintenance walkthroughs for each of the critical elements of fire door hardware.