Remediation Interpretation Bulletin – Egress Time (6.1)

Scope
This interpretation clarifies assumptions governing means of egress requirements in Part 6 in the Alliance Fire Safety and Structural Integrity Standard (version 1.1) for factories inspected by the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, its staff, and designated Qualified Assessment Firms and their employees.

Purpose
This interpretation addresses questions regarding the allowable egress time from factories or portions of factories governed by the Alliance Standard.

Alliance Requirements
Buildings shall be provided with a means of egress system for all occupants to safely evacuate from buildings and structures. (Section 6.1)

Background
Building owners, managers and other interested parties frequently inquire as to whether the Alliance requires a building evacuation or egress to be accomplished within a specified time limit. These questions usually arise as the consequence of confusion regarding the intended purpose of other requirements, such as the fire resistance requirements for exit enclosures and the allowable length and width of egress components. In most instances, those questioning these requirements assume the time to egress a building should be only a few minutes. In some cases, they have experience of evacuating the building in question in a specific time limit.

Discussion
Safe egress under emergency conditions is more than a matter of speed. In the absence of adequate attention to other conditions, an undue emphasis on speed will produce competitive flight behavior that can easily result in injuries or deaths to building occupants.

Like other international building regulations, neither the Alliance Standard nor the Bangladesh National Building Code specify a maximum allowable egress or escape time. Instead of emphasizing time, these codes rely on distance or length as a surrogate for time, and in doing so address the conditions required to ensure occupants move freely, without competition or conflict, until they reach a place of safety (see especially Alliance 6.5, 6.6.2 and 6.13).

Effective egress requires that all occupants reach a place of safety well before conditions in the building become untenable to life. To achieve this, the Alliance Standard and other building regulations focus on aspects of the built environment that contribute to adequate egress time as well as those that facilitate the efficient movement of people.

It should be noted too that evacuation is not always the best strategy for protecting building occupants during an emergency. In many instances, protecting occupants in place will ensure exit remain freely available to those in most danger while also preventing harm to those already in a safe area.
Additionally, it may be necessary for people with disabilities or infirmities to remain inside the building until someone can assist them to reach a place of safety. In some instances, these people may not receive assistance until firefighters arrive, but should be provided with sufficient protection to avoid harm until they can be rescued or retrieved.

Instructions
1. Refrain from specifying egress time limits or providing guidance regarding desired egress times.
2. Verify the appointment of a fire safety director responsible for overall condition of fire and evacuation measures in the building as required in Alliance 13.1.
3. Confirm the fire safety director has prepared and posted occupant load limits and evacuation plans in required locations as specified in Alliance 6.4.4 and 13.3.
4. Determine whether the number of workers trained in fire safety practices meet requirements of the Alliance Standard.
5. Verify the factory has performed periodic evacuation drills as required in Alliance Standard 13.2.

Changes
1. Corrected reference to “Quality Assurance Firms” in Scope to read “Qualified Assessment Firms.”

Authority

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