

Guide to escape and rescue routes

If kept clear and properly signed, escape and rescue routes can save lives in emergency situations and form an important part of emergency plans. An important duty of those responsible for safety (safety officers, contact persons for workplace health and safety) – in collaboration with those responsible for emergency planning – is to check the condition of escape and rescue routes periodically and insist on compliance with the relevant provisions (particularly in terms of ensuring things are properly set up).

1. Scope

This guide is intended to help people check escape and rescue routes in properties belonging to the University of Bern. It is based on fire protection provisions and standards, directives, and information sheets from Switzerland's Association of Cantonal Fire Insurance Providers (Vereinigung Kantonaler Feuerversicherungen – VKF) and the building insurance provider Gebäudeversicherung Bern (GVB). It is aimed at those responsible for safety (safety officers, contact persons for workplace health and safety), members of the team responsible for emergency planning, and anyone who uses these routes. Any escape or rescue routes that are no longer functional or have been converted must be reported immediately by anyone concerned to those responsible for safety or suitable remedial action must be taken without delay!

Any changes in fire protection provisions or GVB specifications which contradict this implementation guide shall be given priority and render this guide obsolete.

2. Terminology

In its fire protection directive 10-15de (2015), the VKF defines a number of terms as follows:

Escape route	Shortest route from a given location to a place of safety either within the building or outside.
Rescue route	Shortest route by which the fire service and other units deployed can reach a given location in the building. Escape routes may also be rescue routes.
Fire compartments	Areas of buildings and facilities kept separate from each other by elements designed to create 'compartments' for fire purposes.

3. Statutory specifications as per Switzerland's fire protection standard

Art. 2, Scope

- 1 Fire protection provisions apply to newly constructed buildings and facilities, as well as to movable structures accordingly.
- 2 Existing buildings and facilities must be modified commensurately to reflect fire protection provisions if:
 - a significant structural or operational changes, extensions, or changes in use are introduced;
 - b the risk to humans is particularly high.

Art. 37, Keeping routes clear

- 1 Escape and rescue routes may be used as access routes. They must be kept free and safe to use at all times. They must not be used for any other purposes when not in use.

4. Duties of those responsible for safety (safety officers, contact persons for workplace health and safety)

Those responsible for safety must check escape routes at regular intervals using the SUVA checklist for escape routes (67157.D). As regards existing office and commercial buildings, any exceptions concerning the use of corridors may be defined in consultation with the Facility Management Office and the Risk Management Office. The following exceptions do not apply to any vertical escape and rescue routes (stairwells), high-rise buildings (>22 m), or buildings where large numbers of people are present (rooms with >100 people).

Provisions regarding fixtures and fittings for corridors in office and commercial buildings:

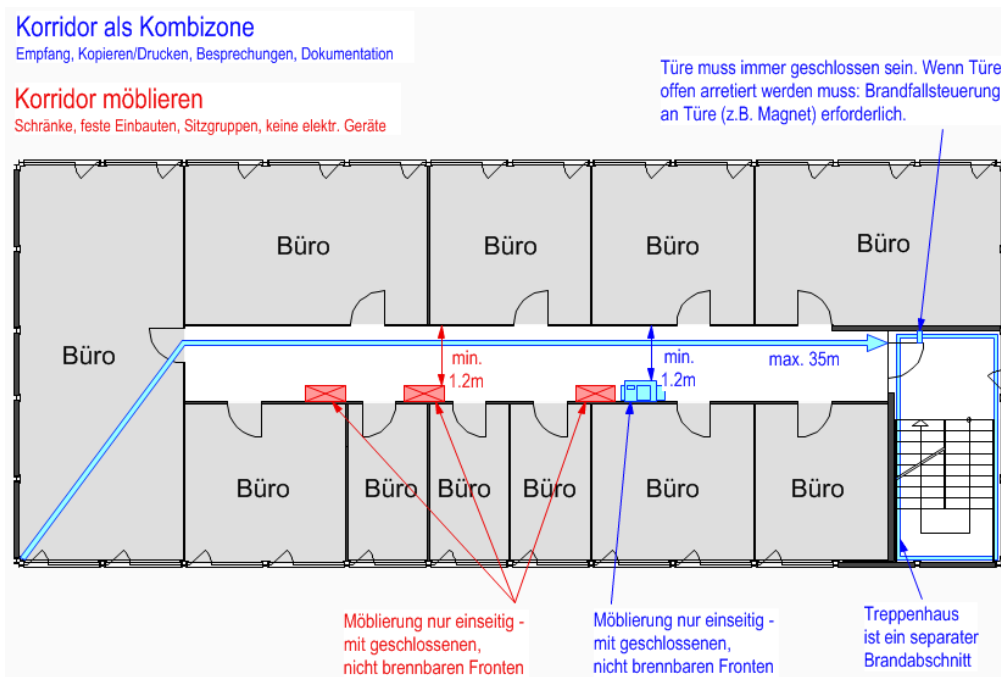
(cabinets, permanent fixtures, groups of chairs, no electrical devices, no workplaces)

- Ensure a minimum escape route width of 1.2 m
- Only fit non-combustible fronts to cabinets and permanent fixtures
- Arrange cabinets and permanent fixtures on one side only (no slalom courses)

Additional provisions regarding the use of corridors in office buildings¹ as a combined zone:

(reception, copying/printing, discussions, documentation)

- Length of escape route from any part of the room to the stairwell must not exceed 35 m
- Corridor and stairwell are separate fire compartments
- Communal areas containing electrical devices like a fridge or oven and the like must be located in niches (any such areas in new buildings must be kept separate from escape routes and offer E 30 (nbb) fire resistance).



Literature

Vereinigung Kantonalen Feuerversicherung. (2015). *Brandschutznorm (Fire protection standard)*. www.praever.ch/de/bs/vs

Vereinigung Kantonalen Feuerversicherung. (2015). *Brandschutzrichtlinie. Flucht- und Rettungswege (Fire protection directive. Escape and rescue routes)/16-15de*. www.praever.ch/de/bs/vs

SUVA. (2015). *Checkliste: Fluchtwege (Checklist: escape routes)/67157.D*. www.suva.ch

¹ If an office floor contains other spaces besides offices, such as seminar rooms and laboratories, it makes sense to conduct an assessment of escape routes (number of people/public access, i.e. people not familiar with surroundings/potential risks associated with laboratories, etc.).