



FLORIDA FIRE MARSHALS AND INSPECTORS ASSOCIATION

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FFMIA Ad-Hoc Committee – Walmart Security Gate Installations

Committee Members: Cheryl Edwards (Chair), Karl Thompson, Shar Beddow,
Douglas Carter, Alex Onishenko

Update:

The ad-hoc committee looking into the Walmart security gate installations submitted the request for a Declaratory Statement from the State Fire Marshal as approved by the FFMIA Board. We expected a ruling this month, but instead were notified that the SFMO would not answer the five questions as asked. Committee member Karl Thompson, who crafted the request, and I participated in a conference call with SFMO representatives Catherine Thrasher, John Gatlin, Casia Sinco, Melvin Stone, and Mike Long on February 19, 2020. SFMO Attorney Catherine Thrasher offered to assist in rewording the questions in a manner in which they would answer. However, through the discussion it was made clear that the Declaratory Statement would only be applicable to one location and could not be a blanket answer for all Walmart stores in the State.

The purpose of the actions of this committee was to bring conformity throughout the State to the application of the Code concerning the installation of these gates. With the clarification that the Declaratory Statement would not provide this, the decision was made to withdraw the request for the Declaratory Statement and not spend more time and effort going down this path as it would not provide a means of bringing conformity across the State.

The ad-hoc committee had a conference call today to discuss these findings and determine a recommendation to the Board.



Recommendation:

Jurisdictions reviewing plans for the installation of security gates and/or finding gates already installed should pay particular attention to the following Code sections:

FFPC 101:36/37.2.5.4 Aisles leading to each exit shall be required, and the aggregate width of such aisles shall be not less than the required width of the exit.

FFPC 101:36/37.2.5.5 Required aisles shall be not less than 36 in. (915 mm) in clear width.

FFPC 101:36/37.2.5.6 In Class A mercantile occupancies, not less than one aisle of a 60 in. (1525 mm) minimum clear width shall lead directly to an exit.

FFPC 101:36/37.2.5.7 In mercantile occupancies other than bulk merchandising retail buildings, if the only means of customer entrance is through one exterior wall of the building, one-half of the required egress width from the street floor shall be located in such wall. Means of egress from floors above or below the street floor shall be arranged in accordance with Section 7.5.

FFPC 101:36/37.2.5.8 Not less than one-half of the required exits shall be located so as to be reached without passing through checkout stands.

FFPC 101:36/37.2.5.9 Checkout stands or associated railings or barriers shall not obstruct exits, required aisles, or approaches thereto.

FFPC 101:36/37.2.5.10* Where wheeled carts or buggies are used by customers, adequate provision shall be made for the transit and parking of such carts to minimize the possibility that they might obstruct means of egress.



A.36/37.2.5.10 To eliminate the obstruction to the means of egress of the interior exit access and the exterior exit discharge, it is the intent to provide adequate area for transit and parking of wheeled carts or buggies used by customers. This area includes corral areas adjacent to exits that are constructed to restrict the movement of wheeled carts or buggies therefrom.

Design professionals should be required to provide accurate occupant load calculations for the stores with drawings showing there is sufficient exiting capacity and that allowable travel distances are met. The gates should be tied to fire alarm systems so the gates release and/or open in direction of travel upon activation.

AHJs will need to work with Walmart management to ensure the aisles and means of egress are clear of obstructions and that merchandise does not impede the means of egress.

Outcome:

The committee agrees that the above information should be reviewed by the FFMIA Board, and if approved, presented to all FFMIA members and AHJs statewide to provide non-binding guidance in reviewing plans for these security gates while bringing consistency to the code application across the state. The information should also be provided to Andrew Valente, PE, FSFPE for Cahuci & Peterson Architects, Engineers, Planners and Daniel Cartwright, Sr. Manager II Fire/Life Safety Compliance for Walmart.

Respectfully submitted,



Cheryl Edwards
Committee Chair

