



UNLOCKING THE STAIRWELLS

It's Not Risky – and It's Good for Business

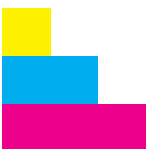
Unlocking the stairwells in a building is a smart move for tenants and landlords alike.

Many office workers in America spend the bulk of their day sitting at a desk, and study after study has shown that sedentary living shortens lives. Taking the stairs instead of elevators or escalators is an easy way for able-bodied employees to work some exercise into their day. Research shows that using the stairs regularly can help reduce an individual's risk of heart disease, stroke, and osteoporosis – and climbing the stairs burns almost five times more calories than riding an elevator, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For landlords, open stairwells are also good for business. Owners can promote their building as a healthy place to work, and save on energy and maintenance costs by running fewer elevator trips throughout the day. What's more, opening the stairwells for regular use can actually protect tenants in case of an emergency.

Why Not?

Some landlords are reluctant to unlock their stairwells, concerned about being held responsible for extra maintenance and any injuries. But a closer look shows there's little to fear and plenty to gain.





Maintenance

Landlords are generally required to keep stairwells as safe as other common areas in the building, regardless of whether the stairs are open or locked. With stairwells open for regular use, tenants can actually help out with safety and maintenance, serving as extra eyes to spot burnt-out light bulbs, debris, loose railings, and other potential problems.

Injuries

Injuries in stairwells can occur, just as they can in other common areas of buildings – and landlords should take precautions to limit their risk of liability. For example, if there's a hazardous condition landlords should know about, they're expected to address it. They're not required, however, to guarantee the safety of everyone on their property. Meanwhile, keeping the stairs accessible and well-maintained can be part of a smart fire safety protocol: tenants who use the stairs regularly will know how to reach them quickly in an emergency – and firefighters and police may be able to reach victims faster if stairwells are unlocked.

Safety

Very few reports of attacks and other crimes in commercial buildings involve office building stairwells. If a building is located in a neighborhood where crime is an issue, landlords can take some basic measures to protect themselves and their tenants: keeping doors to the outside locked, having a security guard monitor the entrance, or by providing employees with keys, electronic ID cards, or security codes for secured access to and from the stairwells.

For a more detailed discussion about the risks and benefits of making stairwells accessible, visit Public Health Law & Policy's website at www.phlpnet.org.



This tool was developed with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Public Health Law & Policy (PHLP) is a nonprofit organization that provides legal information on matters relating to public health. The legal information in this document does not constitute legal advice or legal representation. For legal advice, readers should consult a lawyer in their state.

© 2012 Public Health Law & Policy

Photos: Lavrue at Flickr Creative Commons (cover) and PHLP

Design: Wick Design Studio