

OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

Statute, Rule or Standard Policy Interpretation: **Mini-Atriums: Corridor Separation**

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| Title: | Fire Prevention and Safety |
| Part: | 41 Ill. Adm. Code 100 |
| Section Number: | 100.7(b) |
| Section Title: | Modifications to the Life Safety Code |
| Policy Number: | 08-FP-001 |

Purpose: This instruction provides for current policy and guidance to ensure uniform enforcement of the 2000 edition of the National Fire Protection Association’s *Life Safety Code*. Specifically, the policy addresses requirements for the separation of corridors from the communicating space in “mini-atrium” situations.

Scope: Statewide

Current Code: Section 8.2.5.5 of the 2000 ed. of the NFPA Life Safety Code addresses unenclosed floor openings forming a communicating space between floor levels. Such openings are allowed if they comply with requirements enumerated in Section 8.2.5.5. (These requirements are commonly known as the “mini-atrium” rules of the Life Safety Code). Section 8.2.5.5(4) specifically requires that “*The communicating space (the mini-atrium area) is separated from the remainder of the building by fire barriers with not less than a 1-hour fire resistance rating*”. (The separation is allowed to be reduced to smoke barriers if the building is protected throughout by an automatic sprinkler system). This requirement results in the need for cross-corridor doors to be installed wherever a corridor connects with the mini-atrium space.

Enforcement Policy: The OSFM will not enforce Section 8.2.5.5(4) in new or existing occupancies that:

1. comply with all other requirements of Section 8.2.5.5, **and**
2. are protected throughout by an automatic fire sprinkler system, **and**
3. provide two means of egress for occupants of the building on each floor that is served by the communicating opening (the mini-atrium) that do not require the use of the stairway located within the mini-atrium.

Therefore, in occupancies complying with the above requirements, cross-corridor doors that serve to form a barrier between the communicating space (the “mini-atrium”) and connecting corridors will not be required.

Note that the sprinkler system required to be eligible for this allowance must protect the entire building (and not simply the mini-atrium communicating space of the building).

Reason: The building code that is predominantly adopted by local units of government in the State of Illinois does not require the presence of these cross-corridor separation doors between the mini-atrium area and the connecting corridors if the building is protected throughout by automatic sprinklers. This has caused the construction of

many occupancies, particularly hotel/motel occupancies, that offer a central two story mini-atrium connecting the first and second floors in the lobby area of the building, without the presence of cross-corridor doors to separate the central mini-atrium area from the guest room corridors either on one, or both floors of the building that intersect the mini-atrium opening.

Furthermore, the Life Safety Code allows for an open stairway connecting the first and second floor in a two story building that is protected throughout by automatic sprinklers (without separation of such an unprotected vertical opening from connecting corridors) but then requires the presence of the cross-corridor separation doors for compliance with the mini-atrium rules in a three story building even if the mini-atrium only connects the first and second floor of the occupancy. (In other words, the presence of a two-story open mini-atrium between the first and second floor of a two story hotel building is allowed, without the presence of doors to separate the mini-atrium from the guest room corridors. However, if a third story is built onto the building, even though the third story in no way interacts or interconnects with the mini-atrium area which continues to serve only the first and second floor, the guest rooms corridors on the first and second floors must be physically separated from the mini-atrium opening.) The OSFM believes that this requirement is not logical and is overbearing upon the occupancies where mini-atriums are currently encountered.

Lastly, the OSFM believes that the presence of a complete automatic fire sprinkler system throughout all areas of the building combined with compliance with the other required features of Life Safety Code Section 8.2.5.5 and the provision of two means of egress from the floors that are independent of the means of egress located within the mini-atrium opening offers adequate protection to allow for the absence of the cross-corridor doors between the mini-atrium opening and the corridors of the building.

Effective Date: October 1, 2008.