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Understanding new FDNY rules for apartment buildings, 3 RCNY §505-01/02 to assist first responders - by Evan Lipstein

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A new law affecting over 1 million apartments in New York City has been issued and relatively few building managers and owners are aware and paying attention.

The new FDNY rule 3 RCNY §505-01 “Apartment and Guest Room Identification and

Directional Markings and Signs” requires that apartment buildings have door numbers / letters marking all dwelling units for R-1 and R-2 buildings.

Presently your building must have apartment number / letter door markings conspicuously positioned at eye-level between 48” – 60.” This part of 3 RCNY §505-01 simply states that your building’s apartment doors must be properly marked which yours hopefully are already.

There are some new rules to follow though. The new law requires occupancies in Group R-1 and Group R-2 building with more than eight dwelling units on a floor have hallway corridor directional signs to aid emergency personnel in locating apartments when during fires, medical emergencies and other emergencies. The hallway corridor directional signs must be in conspicuous locations in the elevator lobby or other public entry on each floor, and opposite stairwell entrances.

The hallway corridor directional sign must have directional arrows with unit numbers / letters to direction to each unit. There are exceptions; hallway corridor directional signs are not required where all of units are located in a single direction from the elevator or stairwell entrance. If dwelling units are on more than one corridor, directional markings or signs must be placed at each place where the corridor intersects with another corridor. The hallway corridor directional signs must be between 48” – 60” above the floor.

The FDNY’s second rule, 3 RCNY §505-02 “Apartment, Guest Room and Stairwell Fire Emergency Markings” requires new low-mounted markings of apartment entrance doors with emergency markings to help firefighting operations, improving safety for both firefighters and building occupants. The newly required fire emergency marking enables firefighters to find apartment numbers in smoke conditions that obscure normal eye-level door numbers. Such identification ensures firefighters can quickly conduct search and rescue operations.

Additionally, new emergency markings for duplex and triplex apartments make it possible for firefighters to know what level of an apartment they’re entering, i.e., the upper level of a duplex apartment, where temperatures may be unsafe.

The 3 RCNY §505-02 fire emergency markings also show apartments joined horizontally such

as two apartments that have been combined into a single apartment. Combined units doors must be marked with a star or a triangle to show whether they are a main entrance or a secondary entrance.

The need for doors to be marked extends to entrance doors that are obstructed from inside by furniture or even when a door is sealed with sheetrock giving the appearance of an unobstructed entrance door in the public hallway. According to the FDNY depending upon fire conditions its possible that even a lawfully obstructed entrance could be the only or safest means of access to an apartment.

3 RCNY §505-02 also applies to stairwell doors. Stairwell doors must be identified by placing a marking, no higher than 12” off the floor on the doorjamb on the hinged side of the stairwell door in the hall. Some buildings are exempt from this requirement. If the building already has photoluminescent exit path markings or if the building is 100% protected throughout by a sprinkler system.

Owners and managers must be aware of compliance deadlines. FDNY has set compliance deadlines for 3 RCNY §505-01/02. Duplexes and triplexes were to comply by March 30 of 2017; buildings with only single-level apartments need to comply by March 30, 2018.

3 RCNY §505-02 have some owners bristling. While most understand the advantages of this new law, many are complaining that the newly required signs clash with their building’s décor. Under the new code only certain types of materials are permitted for the signs. One type is photoluminescent – which means glow in the dark; the other is retro-reflective, a highly reflective material that reflects light back to its source. Neither is too pretty.

However there is good news for the buildings looking to keep up aesthetics. Hyline Safety offers apartment and stair door signs in custom colors to match your hallway décor. The rule states that the markings characters must contrast with the background against which the characters are viewed so the markings background can be the color of the doorjamb itself just so long as the characters are plainly discernible and are photoluminescent or retroreflective.

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