

Press Release

DEKRA Warns Against Negligence in Fire Safety

How Escape Routes Can Become Death Traps

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- Do not wedge open fire and smoke protection doors
- Escape routes must not be blocked
- The stairwell is the most important escape route

Fire protection rules and regulations in residential buildings are often not consistently implemented by residents and property managers, say experts from DEKRA. Escape routes are often obstructed and fire doors are wedged or tied open, despite the fact they should be closed.

It is an all too common sight in apartment buildings, high-rises and housing complexes – the fire door between the underground car park and the residential building is not closed as it should be, but instead held open with a wooden wedge. “This behavior can be life-threatening for all residents of the building,” says Bernhard Schuhmacher, fire protection expert at DEKRA. “If a fire breaks out in the underground car park, fumes could spread through the stairwell and poison the residents. The escape routes would also become filled with smoke.” If fire and smoke protection doors are not closed, a fire will receive additional fuel from the flow of oxygen no matter where it breaks out.

During fire protection inspections, DEKRA experts like Schuhmacher repeatedly identify this negligent attitude toward fire protection regulations and equipment. A common mistake is blocking emergency doors or even locking them with a key, as observed by fire protection expert Schuhmacher. This turns what should be the escape route into a death trap in the event of a fire. In critical situations, it must always be possible to open emergency doors from the inside and outside without a key. The same applies for entrance doors and doors to underground car parks. House rules stipulating that these doors must be locked with a key at night are not permitted.

Moreover, corridors or exterior staircases that serve as escape routes are often misused as storage spaces for bicycles, flower vases or cupboards. Flammable items such as strollers must not be stored in stairwells and common areas, even if they are not in anyone's way. If they catch fire, these additional “fire loads” can make the main escape route for residents and the rescue route for the fire department impassable.

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About DEKRA

DEKRA has been active in the field of safety for more than 90 years. Founded in 1925 in Berlin as Deutscher Kraftfahrzeug-Überwachungs-Verein e.V., it is today one of the world's leading expert organizations. DEKRA SE is a subsidiary of DEKRA e.V. and manages the Group's operating business. In 2017, DEKRA estimates to have generated sales totalling approximately 3.1 billion Euros. The company currently employs more than 43,000 people in more than 50 countries on all five continents. With qualified and independent expert services, they work for safety on the road, at work and at home. These services range from vehicle inspection and expert appraisals to claims services, industrial and building inspections, safety consultancy, testing and certification of products and systems, as well as training courses and temporary work. The vision for the company's 100th birthday in 2025 is that DEKRA will be the global partner for a safe world.