



Fire Doors Get Used Every Day: **Why They Need Annual Inspections**

Fire doors are not set-it-and-forget-it equipment. They are listed opening protectives that operate constantly in occupied buildings. These doors cycle thousands of times, take impacts from carts and traffic, and get adjusted during routine maintenance. Over time, everyday use can affect whether a door still closes, latches, and protects a rated opening as intended.

As part of a building's passive fire protection system, these assemblies support compartmentation, limit the spread of fire and smoke, and protect egress routes such as corridors and stair enclosures. Annual inspections help confirm the assembly still performs as required.

The Anatomy of a Fire Door Assembly

A fire door is inspected in the field as a complete assembly. The door leaf, frame, hardware, and gasketing (if required) work together to support the fire-protection rating or the opening, and, where required, smoke control performance.

Key components include the door and frame, hinges, the closing device, latching hardware, and any required gasketing or edge seals. Together, these elements determine whether the door will self-close, fully seat in the frame, and positively latch under normal use and during fire conditions.

Field changes can create compliance issues. A closer swap, latch replacement, added access control, or door modification

can introduce non-listed components or change the assembly configuration. Even when the door still operates normally, the opening may no longer match the listing, which can lead to inspection findings and documentation gaps.

Because **fire doors** are installed in rated openings within **fire-resistance**-rated walls and partitions, consistent closing and positive latching support the performance of the rated assembly. If a door fails to positively latch, pressure conditions during a fire can force it open, reducing the effectiveness of the rated opening system.

Fire Rating vs. Smoke and Draft Control

A fire door's fire-protection rating addresses how long the opening can resist fire exposure under test conditions. Smoke and draft control is different. It focuses on limiting smoke movement through the opening, especially along egress paths. A door may be fire-rated, but if clearances are excessive or required seals are missing, smoke can still move through the gaps.

Clearances are about performance, not appearance. **NFPA 80** (Standard for Fire Doors and Other Opening Protectives) sets specific limits for door gaps, including at the head, jambs, and between the bottom of the door and finished floor. These tolerances support proper operation and allow for expected movement under heat. If a door sags or becomes misaligned



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from daily use, gaps can increase, and the assembly may no longer perform as intended.

What a Fire Door Inspection Verifies

A fire door inspection goes beyond a quick walk-by. It verifies that the fire door assembly remains compliant and that field conditions have not introduced issues that could affect performance.

NFPA 80 outlines a comprehensive annual inspection for swinging fire doors. Section 5.2.4 lists 13 required inspection points, covering various aspects of the door assembly, including:

- Labels
- Door and frame surfaces
- Glazing and vision lights
- Hardware and alignment
- Presence of broken or missing parts
- Door clearances
- Operation of the self-closing device
- Coordinator function
- Latching hardware operation
- Absence of auxiliary hardware that interferes with operation
- Verification of no field modifications that void the label
- Integrity of gasketing and seals
- Compliance of signage with requirements listed in 4.1.4

These inspections must include a visual review from both sides and an operational test, performed by a qualified person with all findings documented.

Common Issues Found in the Field

Inspection findings are often tied to everyday wear and tear. Misalignment is one of the most frequent. Heavy use can loosen hardware and affect alignment, causing the door to bind, drag, or fail to close smoothly.

Hardware swaps are another common issue. Maintenance teams may replace a broken latch quickly to restore function. If the replacement part is not listed or compatible, the opening may no longer match the fire door listing requirements, creating compliance and documentation gaps. Introducing new preps in the door (outside of what is allowed

in the field by NFPA 80) also is an area of concern and requires review by the listing agency.

The Role of Labels & Certification Marks

The label on the fire door provides evidence that the door was tested and is certified for its intended fire-protection use. If a label is missing, painted over, or unreadable, the door can become a compliance concern, even if it appears to operate normally.

One way to identify certified products in the field is through a recognized certification mark. **Intertek's Warnock Hersey (WH) Mark** is the leading Fire Product Safety and Performance Mark for building and construction products. Products bearing the WH certification indicate compliance with relevant building codes, association criteria, and product safety and performance standards. The mark also reflects ongoing follow-up inspections at the manufacturing and machining sites. To learn more and download the brochure, visit Data Center Services.

When Field Labeling Is a Good Option

If a label is missing or a door has been modified, replacement is not always the next step. Field inspection and labeling provide a way to evaluate the door in place and document compliance when conditions allow. Intertek's field labeling services support this process by evaluating the assembly against applicable requirements.

Field inspection and labeling can be helpful when labels are missing or damaged, hardware was replaced without documentation, or renovations changed opening conditions or use.

Click here to learn more about Intertek's **fire doors testing solutions** and the **Warnock Hersey (WH) Mark**.

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