

Why NFPA 80 Compliance Testing Matters for Your Commercial Doors

Fire Door Inspections Are Not Optional

If you manage a commercial building, you already know the fire marshal can show up at any time. What many property owners don't realize is how often a simple oversight with a fire door can lead to a failed inspection or worse, a safety hazard. Fire doors are not just heavy pieces of metal. They are engineered assemblies designed to contain fire and protect egress paths. When they don't work properly, people can get trapped or flames can spread faster than expected. That is why NFPA 80 compliance testing exists in the first place.

I have spent years working with overhead doors and fire-rated assemblies in Michigan. Over that time I have seen the same problems come up again and again. Doors that sag on their hinges, gaps around the perimeter that are too wide, or labels that have been painted over so many times they are no longer readable. Each of these issues is a violation of NFPA 80. And each one can be caught early with regular testing. The real trick is understanding what the standard actually requires versus what people assume it requires.

Understanding the Core Requirements

NFPA 80 covers the installation, maintenance, and inspection of fire doors and other opening protectives. It is not a suggestion. It is a code adopted by most jurisdictions across the United States. The standard requires that fire doors be inspected at least annually, and that any deficiencies be corrected promptly. But the inspection itself has to follow a specific checklist. You cannot just walk by a door, give it a tug, and call it good. The inspector must verify that the door is self-latching, that the clearances are within tolerance, that the hinges and hardware are intact, and that the fire rating label is still legible.

One area that trips up a lot of facility managers is the clearance requirement. NFPA 80 states that the gap between the bottom of the door and the floor can be no more than 3/4 inch. That sounds simple enough, but over time floors settle, doors sag, and thresholds wear down. I have seen gaps as wide as 2 inches on doors that were installed correctly a decade ago. That is a clear violation. A thorough [NFPA 80 compliance testing](#) protocol will catch these issues before they become a problem with an inspector or a fire event.

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What Actually Happens During a Test

When a technician shows up to perform NFPA 80 compliance testing, they do not just look at the door. They check the frame, the hinges, the locking mechanism, the self-closing device, and the latching hardware. They measure the gaps at the top and sides as well as the bottom. They look for damage, corrosion, and missing parts. They verify that the door swings freely and that the closer is adjusted properly. They also check that any glazing, like fire-rated glass, is intact and has the correct label.



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For rolling steel fire doors, which are common in warehouses and loading docks, the inspection includes checking the barrel, the guides, the chain or motor operator, and the fire release device. This is where a lot of commercial facilities fall short. Rolling fire doors are heavy and they get a lot of abuse from forklifts and pallet jacks. A door that is dented or has a bent guide is a door that might not close fully when the fire alarm sounds. That is a serious problem. And it is exactly the kind of thing that a regular NFPA 80 compliance testing schedule is meant to prevent.

Common Deficiencies and How to Avoid Them

Over the years I have compiled a mental list of the most common fire door deficiencies I encounter. They repeat across different buildings and different industries. Knowing what they are can help you stay ahead of your inspection.

- Missing or broken self-closing devices. A fire door that does not close and latch on its own is not a fire door at all.
- Gaps that exceed the allowable limits. This is especially common at the bottom of the door.
- Paint or debris buildup on the hinges or the door edge that prevents proper closure.
- Labels that have been painted over or damaged so the rating is no longer visible.
- Hardware replaced with non-fire-rated parts, like a standard latch instead of a fire-rated one.

Each of these can be fixed before the annual inspection if you know to look for them. That is the real value of NFPA 80 compliance testing. It is not just about passing a test. It is about making sure the door will actually work when you need it to.

Who Should Perform the Testing

NFPA 80 does not require that the inspection be performed by a specific certification body, but it does require that the person performing it have knowledge of the standard and be able to

identify deficiencies. In practice, most building owners rely on a trained door technician or a fire door inspector. Some companies offer a separate inspection service, but many door contractors include it as part of their preventive maintenance program.

I have seen situations where a well-meaning maintenance person tries to do the inspection themselves. They check the door, find nothing obviously wrong, and sign off on it. Then the fire marshal comes in and finds three violations. The problem is that the typical maintenance person does not know the specific measurements and tolerances required by the standard. They also might not recognize that a missing screw in a hinge or a worn-out closer spring can cause the door to fail under fire conditions. That is why it is worth hiring someone who does this work every day.

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Recordkeeping and Documentation

Another part of NFPA 80 that gets overlooked is the recordkeeping requirement. The standard says that the inspection results must be recorded and kept on file. This includes the date of the inspection, the name of the inspector, the condition of the door, and any deficiencies found. The records must be available for review by the authority having jurisdiction. That means you need a paper trail. If the fire marshal shows up and you cannot produce the inspection records, that can be a violation in itself.



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A good technician will provide you with a written report after each inspection. Keep those reports in a binder or a digital folder. I recommend keeping at least the last three years of records readily accessible. It also helps to note any repairs that were made between inspections. That way you can show a history of maintenance if any questions come up.

Cost of Non-Compliance

The cost of skipping NFPA 80 compliance testing can be much higher than the cost of the test itself. I am not just talking about fines, though those can be substantial. I am talking about liability. If a fire occurs and a door fails to contain it, and it turns out the door had a known deficiency that was never addressed, the building owner can face serious legal consequences. Insurance companies are also starting to ask for proof of annual fire door inspections before they renew policies. If you cannot provide it, your premiums go up or your coverage gets dropped.

I have also seen cases where a facility had to shut down operations for days while doors were brought into compliance. That kind of downtime costs money. It disrupts shipping, receiving, and production. A simple annual inspection is cheap insurance against all of that.

Making It Part of Your Routine

The best approach is to schedule NFPA 80 compliance testing as part of your regular facility maintenance calendar. If you already have a preventive maintenance plan for your HVAC system or your roof, add the fire doors to that list. Pick a time of year that works for your business, maybe during a slow season or a shutdown period, and stick with it. That way the inspection never sneaks up on you.

Some facilities choose to do a mid-year walk-through themselves to catch obvious issues, then bring in a professional for the formal annual inspection. That is a smart strategy. It keeps the doors in good shape all year and reduces the chance of surprises. But the formal inspection still needs to happen. There is no substitute for a trained eye and a calibrated set of tools.



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Final Thoughts from Experience

I have worked with many types of doors over the years, from residential garage doors to heavy industrial rolling steel doors. Fire doors are one of the most important safety devices in any commercial building. They do not get the same attention as fire alarms or sprinkler systems, but they are just as critical. A properly maintained fire door can be the difference between a contained fire and a building-wide disaster.

If you are in Michigan and need a reliable partner for your door service needs, Michigan Overhead Door & Loading Dock, located at 560 E Reid Rd, Grand Blanc, MI 48439, USA, with phone +1 810-603-2600, offers expert overhead door solutions for residential, commercial, and industrial customers across Michigan. As a family-owned company serving the community since 2003, we specialize in garage door installation, overhead door repair, preventive maintenance, rolling steel doors, high-speed doors, fire-rated doors, loading dock equipment, smart garage door openers, and same-day service. Our experienced technicians service all major brands and are committed to delivering dependable workmanship, fast response times, and long-lasting solutions. Whether you need a new installation, emergency repair, or routine maintenance, we are dedicated to keeping your doors operating safely and efficiently.