Door Vision Panels

The multi-purpose vision panel

From a security perspective, vision panels provide an opportunity for at least some visual surveillance of the corridor in both directions without opening an office or classroom door. As a safety feature, it allows the person opening the door the ability to see if someone is behind the door as it is being opened. An individual on the opposite side of the door will also be able to see that someone is about to open the door and can move accordingly.

Even more important, increased visibility of classrooms and offices helps prevent child abuse or misconduct, and helps to help prevent false accusations, which can also destroy reputations and lives. As such, it is recommended that all classroom and office doors have vision panels as a minimum.

It is also important that staff and volunteers do not negate the purpose of the vision panels or windows by covering them with blinds, drapes, paper or other materials; however, some security personnel may recommend covering the vision panel during an emergency that involves lockdown of classrooms.

Selecting a vision panel

A vision panel, which may average around 5 inches wide by 20 inches tall, provides just enough visibility while maintaining the integrity of the fire door between the corridor and the room. Framing for the glass will also meet fire resistance requirements. A good local glazier will know what is needed for each circumstance and should have a chart that defines the dimensions of the fire-resistant glass that corresponds with the original fire rating of the door per local code requirements. To reduce the potential for breakage and injuries, Grade "A" safety glass should be used. In general, full-sized windows are not recommended as (1) it may be difficult to maintain the fire rating of the door and (2) the potential for contact and breakage by occupants may increase.

Do you have vision panels?

If you already have windows in your doors, they may have safety glass and may meet code fire rating requirements. If they do, make sure they are not covered. If there are no windows or vision panels, this is as good a time as any to put vision panels on your project list and begin phasing them in.