Q: Should a facility evaluate locking devices during a fire drill?

A: Yes.
The main purpose of a fire drill is to test and evaluate the efficiency, knowledge, and response of personnel in implementing the facility fire emergency plan. However, drills are also used to evaluate equipment/building response: did the pull station/smoke detector work, were the alarms loud enough for all to hear, did the transmission to the monitoring station succeed, did the phone system work, did the smoke and fire doors close, did corridor doors close, did the locking devices unlock/was the means of egress clear, did the dampers shut down the HVAC, did the elevator FF function work, etc. Some of the code references follow – I highlighted in green those items that are not solely dependent on staff to perform (but to assess and respond accordingly). A fire drill is a concept where many fire requirements come together.

And don’t forget these devices should also be evaluated by the vendors during routine inspection, testing and maintenance.

2012 NFPA 101 References

A.1.1.6(1) This Code is intended to be adopted and used as part of a comprehensive program of building regulations that include building, mechanical, plumbing, electrical, fuel gas, fire prevention, and land use regulations.

1.2* Purpose. The purpose of this Code is to provide minimum requirements, with due regard to function, for the design, operation, and maintenance of buildings and structures for safety to life from fire. Its provisions will also aid life safety in similar emergencies.

A.1.2 The Code endeavors to avoid requirements that might involve unreasonable hardships or unnecessary inconvenience or interference with the normal use and occupancy of a building but provides for fire safety consistent with the public interest. Protection of occupants is achieved by the combination of prevention, protection, egress, and other features, with due regard to the capabilities and reliability of the features involved. The level of life safety from fire is defined through requirements directed at the following:
(1) Prevention of ignition
(2) Detection of fire
(3) Control of fire development
(4) Confinement of the effects of fire
(5) Extinguishment of fire
(6) Provision of refuge or evacuation facilities, or both
(7) Staff reaction
(8) Provision of fire safety information to occupants

4.8.2.1* Emergency plans shall include the following:
(1) Procedures for reporting of emergencies
(2) Occupant and staff response to emergencies
(3) *Evacuation procedures appropriate to the building, its occupancy, emergencies, and hazards (see Section 4.3)
(4) Appropriateness of the use of elevators
(5) Design and conduct of fire drills
(6) Type and coverage of building fire protection systems
(7) Other items required by the authority having jurisdiction

19.1.1.3.1 All health care facilities shall be designed, constructed, maintained, and operated to minimize the possibility of a fire emergency requiring the evacuation of occupants.

19.1.1.3.2 Because the safety of health care occupants cannot be ensured adequately by dependence on evacuation of the building, their protection from fire shall be provided by appropriate arrangement of facilities, adequate, trained staff; and development of operating and maintenance procedures composed of the following:
(1) Design, construction, and compartmentation
(2) Provision for detection, alarm, and extinguishment
(3) Fire prevention procedures and planning, training, and drilling programs for the isolation of fire, transfer of occupants to areas of refuge, or evacuation of the building.

19.7.2.1.1 For health care occupancies, the proper protection of patients shall require the prompt and effective response of health care personnel.

19.7.2.1.2 The basic response required of staff shall include the following:
(1) Removal of all occupants directly involved with the fire emergency
(2) Transmission of an appropriate fire alarm signal to warn other building occupants and summon staff
(3) Confinement of the effects of the fire by closing doors to isolate the fire area
(4) Relocation of patients as detailed in the health care occupancy’s fire safety plan

19.7.2.2 Fire Safety Plan. A written health care occupancy fire safety plan shall provide for all of the following:
(1) Use of alarms
(2) Transmission of alarms to fire department
(3) Emergency phone call to fire department
(4) Response to alarms
(5) Isolation of fire
(6) Evacuation of immediate area
(7) Evacuation of smoke compartment
(8) Preparation of floors and building for evacuation
(9) Extinguishment of fire