



IAFC Board of Directors Position Statement

Reducing Stairs in Residential Buildings Higher Than Three Stories Creates Escape Hazards for Occupants and Inhibits Vital Emergency Response Operations

The Issue at Hand:

A concerning trend towards deregulation seeks to eliminate the current code requirements for R-2¹ residential buildings, driven by purported benefits such as increased housing availability and reduced costs. It really endangers occupants and inhibits emergency response operations. The consensus process has been used for decades to reflect all parties' interests. These proposals, backed by developers, builders, and urban planners, bypass the established National Code Consensus process, leading to local exceptions and allowances that jeopardize occupant and firefighter safety.

The Importance of Two Staircases:

The requirement for two separate staircases in residential buildings above three stories is grounded in scientific research and the consensus code process. This provision ensures vital redundancy in egress options, crucial for occupant evacuation and firefighter access during emergencies. It is founded on the principle of safeguarding lives and is not to be compromised for short-term gains.

Addressing Contemporary Fire Challenges:

Modern hazards, such as those posed by lithium-ion battery-powered devices, underscore the need to be able to exit a building quickly and safely in an emergency. The proliferation of such risks necessitates stringent adherence to building codes that prioritize occupant and firefighter safety, with the inclusion of a second staircase serving as a cornerstone of this protective framework.

Enhancing Safety and Accessibility:

Beyond its life-saving implications, the provision of two staircases enhances the efficiency, convenience, and inclusivity of residential living environments. It mitigates congestion, promotes equitable access for individuals with mobility challenges, and fosters a more welcoming community for all residents. This is especially important when more and more combustible products, including delivered packages and vanity trash collection services add potential fuel loads into the corridors.

¹ R-2 type building. What is involved, the R-2 Residential occupancies contain sleeping units of more than two dwelling units where the occupants are primarily permanent in nature. This includes apartment houses, boarding houses (not transient), convents, dormitories, fraternities and sororities, Hotels (non-transient), monasteries, motels (non-transient), vacation timeshare properties.

Considering Long-Term Implications:

While critics may raise concerns about construction costs and usable floor space, the benefits of retaining the two-staircase requirement far outweigh these considerations. Moreover, amendments to model codes can impact insurance ratings and lead to increased costs and unnecessary risks for both the public and emergency responders.

Submitted by the Fire & Life Safety Section Board

The International Association of Fire Chiefs, represented by its Fire & Life Safety Section (FLSS), hereby declares its unwavering support for the retention of the requirement for a second staircase in [R-2](#) residential structures exceeding three stories. This position is vital to enable fire and emergency services to respond effectively to incidents, safeguarding both occupants and firefighters.

Call to Action:

The IAFC urges fire service leaders to vehemently oppose legislative attempts to amend out the second staircase requirement. It is imperative to engage with urban planners, legislators, and the building community, providing informed perspectives to ensure the safety of communities and the welfare of those who serve them.

In conclusion, the IAFC reaffirms its commitment to advocating for measures that prioritize safety in residential structures, emphasizing the irreplaceable value of two staircases in ensuring the well-being of occupants and responders alike.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs, through its Fire & Life Safety Section (FLSS), is adopting this position paper on the need to continue the requirements for a second staircase in [R-2](#) residential structures above three stories so the fire and emergency service can better respond to incidents effectively.

Submitted By: IAFC Fire & Life Safety Section - March 3, 2024
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