

CITY OF BATH, MAINE

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Fire Code Requirements for Apartment Buildings

Below is a synopsis of some of the code requirements for existing, unsprinklered, wood frame buildings of 3 or more dwelling units.

Egress

Each dwelling unit must have access to 2 exits, located as remotely from each other as possible with the following exceptions:

- a. Dwelling units with a door directly to outside at ground level.
- b. Dwelling units with direct access to an outside stair serving no more than 2 dwelling units.
- c. Dwelling units with direct access to an interior stair serving that unit only with walls of 1-hour fire resistance and no opening therein.

In residential occupancies, access to an outside stair as a second means of egress from a dwelling unit room can be via a window in accordance with the following:

- a. The window in the full open position has a clear opening of at least 20" in width, 24" in height, and 5.7 square feet in area, with the sill no more than 44" above the floor. (Note that 20" x 24" is not 5.7 square feet. The 20" and 24" are minimums).
- b. If an existing window does not meet the size requirements in item a. it will be acceptable to install a casement or removable sash double hung window that make the clear window opening available for egress meet the size criteria in item a.. (Some double hung windows do not meet the clear opening size criteria with the bottom sash in the up position, but would if the sashes came out and the entire window area was available for egress.)

Lighting

All means of egress must have lighting. Lighting must be such that it is on all the time, or controlled automatically, or arranged so that it can be turned on conveniently by those entering and exiting the building.

Buildings over three stories in height or with more than 12 dwelling units must have emergency lighting facilities in all means of egress that come on automatically in the event of loss of power.

Exit Signs

Buildings with more than one means of egress must have EXIT signage where the direction to go to exit the building is not obvious. New EXIT signs must be internally lit (electric) or self-luminous unlit signs (glow in the dark).

Vertical Opening Protection

Vertical openings through buildings such as stairwells, dumb waiters, laundry chutes, etc. must be protected so that fire cannot readily spread between floors. Typically that walls of vertical openings need to be ½ hour rated (plaster on lath in good repair and various wallboard arrangements typically meet this) with any doors opening into the protected area (the stairwell etc.) 20 minute rated (a 1 ¾" solid wood door is considered to be 20 minute rated, among others). Non-occupied spaces cannot have openings into exit stairwells. These requirements do not apply to openings within a dwelling unit.

Hazardous Areas

Hazardous areas such as rooms containing central heating plants, laundries, shops, storage rooms, etc. must have 1 hour rated walls/ceilings or sprinkler protection and smoke resistant construction. Sprinklers can be fed from domestic water supplies per specifications available from the Codes Office. Hazardous areas must have at least one fire extinguisher rated at least 2A/10BC mounted near the entrance to the area. Extinguishers must be mounted in permanent, visible, marked if necessary locations so that the top of the extinguisher is no more than 5' above the floor and there is at least 4" of clear space below the bottom of the extinguisher.

Fire Detection

Every dwelling unit must have at least one single station smoke detector powered from the building electrical system. The detector(s) must be located so as to be audible in the sleeping rooms of the unit. Buildings with more than 11 dwelling units or 3 stories in height must have a fire detection system (pull stations, smoke detection, horns, lights, battery backup, etc.) in the common areas such as halls, stairs, basements, etc. that activates as alarm audible throughout the building.

Corridors/Exit Access

Exit corridors must be of ½ hour construction. Doors between living units and corridors/stairwells must be self-closing with latches. Self-closing is achieved by lever type doors closers or spring-loaded hinges. Screen door type hardware (tension springs, piston type closers, etc.) is not acceptable. Doors must close and latch upon release from the 90 degrees open position.

Miscellaneous

All equipment and systems such as wiring, heating, etc. must be in conformance with applicable codes. All means of egress must be kept accessible and free of snow and ice.

These are the requirements applicable to typical buildings. Other requirements may apply. The Fire Inspectors of Codes Officer can assist you with any questions you may have.

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