

U.S. Fire Administration / National Fire Academy

*Coffee Break Training***Topic: Protecting Fire Escape Stairs**

Learning objective: The student shall be able to identify requirements for protecting fire escape stairs from exposures.

In many older cities around the world, fire escape stairs may provide an alternate means of egress from upper floors. While not permitted for new construction, fire escape stairs may be a good solution for existing buildings where emergency escape is limited.

Depending on the adopted building and fire codes in your jurisdiction, fire escape stairs should not provide more than 50 percent of the required means of egress. New fire escape stairs generally are permitted on existing buildings only where the code official has determined that alternative means of escape are impractical.

Fire escape stairs should be located so a fire will not threaten persons leaving the building or affect the stairs' structural integrity. Depending on your code, openings near fire escape stairs should be protected with approved fire door or fire window assemblies having a minimum 45-minute rating where the opening or any portion of the opening is located as follows:



- (1) Within 10 (3,046 mm) or 15 ft (4,570 mm) horizontally of any balcony, platform, or stairway,
- (2) Below, measured vertically, within three stories or 35 ft (10.7 m) of any balcony, platform, walkway, or stairway, or within two stories or 20 ft (6,100 mm) of a platform or walkway leading from any story to the fire escape stair, or,
- (3) Above, measured vertically, within 10 ft (3,050 mm) of any balcony, platform, or walkway, measured vertically, or within 10 ft (3,050 mm) of any stair tread surface.

Where access is permitted through windows, the windows should be arranged and maintained so they can be opened easily. Screens, storm windows, or other obstruction should be prohibited.

Access to a fire escape stair should be direct to a balcony, landing, or platform that should be not more than 8 in. (205 mm) below the floor level or 18 inches (457 mm) below the sill.

For additional information, refer to *International Fire Code*[®], Chapter 10; *International Building Code*[®], Chapter 34; or *NFPA 101*[®], *Life Safety Code*[®] Chapter 7.