



# **INFORMATION BULLETIN**

## Single Exit Stairway Provisions for Multifamily Residential Buildings Over Three Stories

### **Purpose**

This bulletin outlines the requirements and application procedures for proposing a single exit, single stairway in multifamily residential buildings exceeding three stories in the City of Santa Monica. While 2022 & 2025 California Building Code (CBC) Section 1006.3.4 limits such buildings to three stories and four units per story, the CBC permits applicants to submit an Alternate Materials and Methods Request (AMMR) to propose a design exceeding three stories limit per Section 104.2.3.

2025 CBC Section 104.2.3, and 2025 California Fire Code Section 104.2.3 state:

***104.2.3 Alternative materials, design and methods of construction and equipment.***

*The provisions of this code are not intended to prevent the installation of any material or to prohibit any design or method of construction not specifically prescribed by this code, provided that any such alternative has been approved.*

***104.2.3.3 Compliance with the code intent.***

*An alternative material, design or method of construction shall comply with the intent of the provisions of this code.*

***104.2.3.4. Equivalency Criteria.***

*An alternative material, design or method of construction shall, for the purpose intended, be not less than the equivalent of that prescribed in this code with respect to all of the following, as applicable:*

1. Quality
2. Strength
3. Effectiveness
4. Durability
5. Safety, other than fire safety
6. Fire Safety

The submitted AMMRs are subject to evaluation/approval by both Building and Safety as well as Fire Department on Case-by-case evaluation based on equivalency of proposed life safety measures.

The CBC allows multifamily buildings more than three stories above grade plane provided there are two exit stairways which can be either interior exit stairway (Section 1023) or exterior exit stairway (Section 1028).

The minimum requirements outlined in this Information Bulletin may be updated upon amendments to the 2025 California Building Code and 2025 California Fire Code.

### **Eligibility and Application Process**

The licensed architect for the proposed multifamily project greater than three stories in height with the proposed single exit must:

- Submit an Alternate Materials and Methods Request per CBC Section 104.2.3.

- Provide justification that life safety, fire protection, and egress performance meet or exceed the intent of the CBC.
- Incorporate enhanced design features as described below.

## Minimum Required Design Features for Consideration

### **Multifamily dwelling (R-2 Occupancy) not more than four stories in height:**

- The building must have not more than four dwelling units per floor.
- The maximum floor area shall be limited to 4,000 sq. ft. per story.
- The building must be sprinklered throughout with NFPA 13.
- The single exit stair must be separated from the building by a 2-hour exit enclosure.
- The exit enclosure doors must be of 1.5-hour fire protection and self-closing.
- The dwelling unit door must be 20-minute rated door and self-closing.
- The travel distance from a dwelling unit door to the exit enclosure door shall be limited to exceed 35 feet.
- The travel distance from the most remote point within a dwelling unit along the natural and unobstructed path of horizontal egress travel to the exit enclosure door shall not exceed 125 feet.
- No occupied roof above the fourth story is permitted.
- The building elevator must be equipped with emergency power and sized to accommodate an ambulance stretcher per CBC 3002.4.
- Exit from the building must be discharged directly to a public street or to an alley which is 20 feet in width.
- A mezzanine floor area within each unit shall be limited to 1/3 of the area of the room in which it is located.
- The exit from the R-2 occupancy shall not pass through any other occupancies.
- No electrical outlets are permitted in exit stairways.
- Trash chutes must be in separate rooms, not accessed from the stairway or corridor.
- The building must be Construction Type III.
- Emergency escape and rescue openings are required in all bedrooms.
- Trash chutes must be in separate rooms, not accessed from the stairway or corridor.

### **Multifamily dwelling (R-2 Occupancy) more than four stories in height but not more than six stories in height:**

- The building must have not more than four dwelling units per floor.
- The maximum floor area shall be limited to 2,000 sq. ft. per story.
- Building must be sprinklered throughout with NFPA 13 fire sprinkler system.
- Exit must be discharged directly to a public street or an alley which is 20 feet in width.
- Dwelling Units must access the single exit stairway through a 1-hour rated corridor.
- The single exit stair must be separated from the building by a 2-hour exit enclosure.

- The stairway enclosure shall be pressurized.
- A fire escape in compliance with Section 804.4.1.2.1 of the California Exiting Building Code shall be provided in addition to the exit stairway.
- The exit enclosure doors must be of 1.5-hour fire protection and self-closing.
- The dwelling unit door must be 20-minute rated door and self-closing.
- The travel distance from a dwelling unit door to the exit enclosure door shall be limited to 20 feet.
- The travel distance from the most remote point within a dwelling unit along the natural and unobstructed path of horizontal egress travel to the exit enclosure door shall not exceed 125 feet.
- The exit from the R-2 occupancy shall not pass through any other occupancies.
- A mezzanine floor area within each unit shall be limited to 1/3 of the area of the room in which it is located.
- Fire Protection and Life Safety Enhancements:
  - Smoke and fire protection at all vertical openings; smoke pressurization system.
  - Emergency escape and rescue openings are required in all bedrooms.
  - Fire alarm and notification system installed.
  - increased stair width.
- The building must be Construction Type I or II.
- Building elevator must be equipped with emergency power and sized to accommodate an ambulance stretcher per CBC 3002.4
- No occupied roofs above the 5<sup>th</sup> floor or 6<sup>th</sup> floor are permitted.
- No other occupancies other than R-2 occupancy are permitted.
- No electrical outlets in exit stairways or corridors.
- Trash chutes must be in separate rooms, not accessed from the stairway or corridor.
- Fire walls may not be used to circumvent single-exit limits by dividing buildings.
- A Peer Review report is required per Section 104.2.3.7 of 2025 California Fire Code and California Building Code.

## Review and Determination

Approval is subject to: Case-by-case evaluation by both Building and Safety Division as well as Fire Department based on equivalency of proposed life safety measures.

## Statewide Code Development

Changes have already been proposed and may be reflected in future editions of the CBC (e.g., 2028 CBC anticipated to allow four-story single-exit buildings statewide).

Per AB 835, the Office of the State Fire Marshal is researching updates to permit taller single-exit buildings (up to the high rise limit). A first draft of their report is expected in September 2025. The final document will be presented to the State Fire Marshal in November/December of 2025.