



PORTLAND MAINE

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Fire Department

Chief Jerome F. LaMoria

General Guidance for Code Compliance of Existing Apartment Buildings

Addressing

All buildings must have approved, contrasting address numbers placed in a position to be plainly legible and visible from the street. Dwelling units and suites shall have similar markings indicating the unit or suite designation on the door.

Storage

No storage in the stairs and hallways. This includes trash, bikes, appliances (including washers and dryers) and other personal items. No storage of flammable or combustible liquids or flammable gasses in the building outside of listed lockers.

Number of means of egress

In most cases 2 exits are required from each dwelling unit and egress windows are required from each sleeping room. The two means of egress shall be arranged to minimize the possibility that both might be rendered impassable by the same emergency condition (fire, smoke, other). A dwelling unit with its own direct exit outside at grade and buildings less than 4 stories in height with a complete sprinkler system may have one exit.

Stairs

Stairs, treads, risers, handrails and guards must be maintained. A minimum of one handrail is required on all existing stairs. Walls require a minimum 60-minute fire rating. Existing plaster and lath is acceptable when properly maintained. Transoms, louvers and transfer grills are not permitted in stairwell walls.

Dwelling unit/basement Fire Doors

Dwelling unit doors and basement doors into the hallways or stairs must be fire rated and self-closing. A minimum of 2 self-closing hinges are required on each fire door. In most cases fire doors must be labeled for at least 60-minutes. Existing buildings with complete sprinkler or fire alarm systems may be exempt from requiring fire rated doors but still must be self-closing and smoke tight.

Hazardous area protection

Fuel-fired heating equipment and/or more than 2 dryers outside of dwelling units are considered hazardous areas. Hazardous areas shall be protected with existing plaster and lath construction with a 60-minute self-closing fire door. If located in an unfinished basement, sprinkler coverage and a smoke tight basement ceiling may be allowed. Ceiling height shall be a minimum of 6'-8" for laundry spaces and travel distance to an exit shall be less than 25' unless two exits are provided.

Interior finish

Interior finish for exits shall be Class A or B, or when the building has a complete sprinkler system Class C is permitted. Other spaces shall be permitted to have Class A, B or C finish. Unrated paneling is not permitted. New floor finish in unsprinklered buildings shall be not less than Class II. New unrated carpeting is not permitted.

Fire alarm systems

Fire alarm systems are required for buildings 4 or more stories in height or with more than 11 dwelling units. They may also be required systems for a number of reasons such as an equivalency to dwelling unit fire doors. Where they are provided they must be maintained by a certified master fire alarm company and have a current fire alarm inspection sticker.

Smoke Alarms

120 volt smoke alarms are required inside dwelling units: inside each sleeping room, immediately outside the sleeping rooms, and on each level of the dwelling unit. Smoke alarms have a 10-year life. New smoke alarms must be photoelectric and have battery backup. Interconnection of the alarms is not required except in the case of new construction or renovation.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarms

120 volt CO alarms with battery backup are required inside dwelling units immediately outside the sleeping rooms, and on each level of the dwelling unit. CO alarms have a 5 or 7-year life. Interconnection of the alarms is not required except in the case of new construction or renovation.

Fire extinguishers and sprinkler systems

Where fire extinguishers and/or sprinkler systems are provided they shall be maintained and have a current inspection tag.

Knox Box

Buildings with fire alarm or sprinkler systems require a Knox Box. Owners are strongly encouraged to use a master key system.

Corridors

Corridor walls require a minimum 30-minute fire rating with 20-minute fire door assemblies when separated from stairwells. If not separated from the stair they must meet the 60-minute wall and fire door stairwell requirements. Existing plaster and lath is acceptable when properly maintained. Transoms, louvers and transfer grills are not permitted in corridor walls.

Electrical

No exposed electrical junctions, missing box covers or open fuse panels. Extension cords are only permitted for temporary use.

* This guidance is general in nature and does not represent a thorough or complete statement of the Fire and Life Safety Codes. Refer to City Code, Chapter 10, Fire Prevention and Protection. More specific questions should be addressed to the Fire Prevention Bureau.