



Guidance on Five Year Inspections of Fire Escapes

Since January 1, 2014, the Berkeley Fire Code has required that existing fire escapes be examined for structural adequacy and safety.¹ This inspection requirement applies to all elements of fire escapes such as the metal balconies and stairs and any fixed or movable ladders associated with the fire escapes. The inspection requirement applies to fire escapes attached to the exterior of buildings. It does not apply to other types of building elements such as elevated porches, walkways and architectural stairs.

What Is Required?

The Berkeley Fire Code requires examination of fire escapes and periodic inspection reports submitted to the Berkeley Fire Department. Specifically, Section 1032.2.1.3 states:

1032.2.1.3 Examination. *Fire escape stairways and balconies shall be examined for structural adequacy and safety by a registered design professional or other person acceptable to the fire code official every 5 years. The examination shall determine whether the fire escape stairways and balconies can support the dead load plus a live load of not less than 100 pounds per square foot (4.78 kN/m). An inspection report shall be submitted to the fire code official after such examination.*

Section 1032.2.1.2 requires fire escapes to be accessible and maintained in good working order:

1032.2.1.2 Maintenance. *Fire escape stairways and balconies shall be kept clear and unobstructed at all times and shall be maintained in good working order.*

Who May Perform the Examination?

The examination may be performed by registered design professionals, e.g., California-registered Structural or Civil Engineers. Examinations may also be performed by other persons acceptable to the fire code official. This includes licensed contractors who are competent in the installation and maintenance of fire escapes.

Once I Get the Examination and Inspection Report, What Do I Do?

Submit a copy of the inspection report to the Berkeley Fire Department. If the examination was conducted in response to a Berkeley Fire Department fire prevention inspection report, please also include a copy of the fire prevention inspection report. Submit the inspection report and, if applicable, the fire prevention inspection report by U.S. mail, email or fax to:

Fire Prevention Division
Berkeley Fire Department
2100 Marin Luther King Jr. Way, 2nd floor,
Berkeley, CA 94704

Email: bfdfireprevention@berkeleyca.gov
Fax: 510-981-5579

For additional information please contact the Fire Prevention Division of the Berkeley Fire Department at (510) 981-5585.

¹ Specific requirements are set forth in California Fire Code Sections 1032.2.1.2 and 1032.2.1.3, which are adopted as the Berkeley Fire Code by Berkeley Municipal Code Section 19.48.010.