

ACCESSIBLE MEANS OF EGRESS

The new ADA/ABA Guidelines will reference the *International Building Code*® (IBC®) for “accessible means of egress.” What does this mean?

WHAT IS A MEANS OF EGRESS?

A means of egress is the path available for a person to leave a building, structure, or space. This route must be unobstructed, and doors along this route cannot be subject to locking from the side that people will be leaving. For example, the rear exit door of a building could require use of a key to get in from the outside for security reasons, but the door must always be openable from the inside without a key so that people can get out in an emergency. This is especially important during situations that may involve evacuation by a large number of people at the same time and/or panic-type situations.

A means of egress consists of three parts: exit access, exit, and exit discharge. Exit access is the path from any location within a building to an exit. An exit is typically a door leading to the outside, or in a multi-story building, an enclosed exit stairway. Exit discharge is the path from the exit to the public way. A public way is a space that is permanently deeded and dedicated to public use, most often a street or alley.

ISN'T THE WAY IN ALWAYS THE WAY OUT (I.E., MEANS OF EGRESS)?

In most buildings, the way in is also the way out. People generally will leave a building the same way they came in since that is the familiar route. However, that is not always possible. A fire could occur at any location in a building. The path used for entry into a space may be blocked. Or, in the case of a multi-story building, the route to the upper floors may include an elevator. Elevators are not permitted to be used as a general means of egress. Occupants are typically instructed to use the exit stairways.

WHY NOT USE THE ELEVATOR?

If smoke is detected in an elevator lobby, the elevators are programmed to return to the ground floor. If smoke is in the elevator shafts, there is a danger of people in elevators succumbing to smoke inhalation before the elevators reach the ground floor. There is also the danger of the elevator delivering the passengers to the floor that contains the fire. In buildings five stories or taller, standby power to the elevators is required so the fire department can use the elevators to move personnel and equipment rapidly into the building to fight the fire and to provide assisted rescue.

WHEN IS MORE THAN ONE WAY OUT (I.E., MEANS OF EGRESS)

The IBC requires at least two means of egress from all buildings and spaces within buildings with very few exceptions. Buildings or spaces with 500 or more occupants are required to have at least three means of egress. Buildings or spaces with more than 1,000 occupants are required to have at least four means of egress.

Some spaces are allowed to have a single exit when the interior travel distance (to the exit) is short and the occupant load (number of people that could be using the space) is low. For example, in a mercantile space, a single means of egress is permitted when there are 50 or fewer calculated occupants in the space or the exit access travel distance is less than 75 feet. The distance is measured along the path of travel, not diagonally across the space.

Allowances for a single means of egress are also given for buildings. Criteria for buildings with a single means of egress are typically as strict or stricter than those for spaces within buildings. For example, a single-exit, two-story business building must have no more than 30 occupants on each floor and a maximum exit access travel distance of 75 feet.

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About the International Code Council

The International Code Council® (ICC®), a membership association dedicated to building safety and fire prevention, develops the codes used to construct residential and commercial buildings, including homes and schools. Most U.S. cities, counties and states choose the *International Codes*®, building safety codes developed by the International Code Council.

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HOW IS AN ACCESSIBLE MEANS OF EGRESS DIFFERENT FROM A GENERAL MEANS OF EGRESS?

When the exit is a door leading directly to the outside, both the general means of egress and the accessible means of egress must be continually available without assistance and are typically the same route. The main difference is where the means of egress is from a basement level or an upper level. Persons who can use stairways will use the exit stairways to evacuate. Persons who cannot use stairways must be able to get to the exit stairways or to an elevator equipped with standby power to obtain “assisted rescue” by emergency responders. It is standard operating procedure for emergency responders to check these locations first for anyone needing assistance.

In a building that is not equipped throughout with a fire sprinkler system, areas of refuge are required at exit stairways and at any elevator with standby power. An area of refuge is an area where persons unable to use the stairways can remain temporarily to await instructions or assistance during emergency evacuation that will protect individuals from smoke and fumes. In buildings equipped throughout with a fire sprinkler system, areas of refuge are not required. Some of the reasoning for this is that activation of the sprinkler system will both start to put out the fire and automatically notify emergency personnel.

The typical fire department response time is 4 to 10 minutes. When the fire department arrives, the sprinkler activation system will indicate where the fire is, thus leading to a faster response time. Either the sprinkler system has succeeded in controlling the fire or the fire department is at the fire event before most occupants realize that there has been a fire.

DO I HAVE TO WAIT FOR FIRE DEPARTMENT RESCUE?

It is always best to wait for trained assistance whenever possible. Fire department personnel have special training and equipment for rescue assistance. Some facilities may have special provisions for assisted rescue, including trained personnel, as part of their evacuation plan.

The International Fire Code® (IFC®) requires an approved fire safety and evacuation plan for many types of facilities including assembly, educational, institutional, hotels, high-rise buildings, underground buildings, large mercantile spaces, and covered malls. While these plans address many egress issues, they may also include provisions specific to persons who may need additional assistance. Evacuation plans must include accounting for all occupants after evacuation and identification and assignment of personnel responsible for rescue or emergency medical aid. The Fire Safety Plan must include procedures for notifying, relocating, or evacuating occupants and plotting accessible egress routes including any areas of refuge. The plans must be reviewed and updated annually. In addition, all assembly, educational, institutional, and hotel buildings must have evacuation drills so that all employees can be trained to assist evacuation.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE EXIT DISCHARGE DOES NOT PROVIDE AN ACCESSIBLE ROUTE?

When fire department personnel provide assisted rescue, they take people a safe distance from the fire. When the accessible route for entry into a space is also the way out, typically a route is available to the public way. However, there are some situations, most often dealing with that second back door exit, where an accessible exit discharge may not be available or feasible. Steep terrain, snow accumulation, or site constraints, such as exiting directly onto a public street or alley, may compromise the accessible route to the public way. In such situations, two alternatives are available. There is no exception for sprinklered buildings. One alternative is to provide an area of refuge inside the building. A second alternative is an exterior area of assisted rescue. The exterior area

for assisted rescue is similar to an interior area of refuge but it is outside the building. The wall between interior and the exterior area of refuge is required to be fire-resistance rated for a minimum of 1 hour to protect persons waiting in this area. There are several advantages to an exterior area of assisted rescue over the area of refuge. Persons with disabilities have stated that they feel more comfortable being able to wait outside the building instead of in a small interior room. The building owners do not feel that they have lost usable interior space, and the fire officials have less concern over exterior areas being maintained free and clear of storage.

WHERE IS ALL THIS INFORMATION LOCATED IN THE INTERNATIONAL BUILDING CODE (IBC)?

Chapter 10 of the IBC is dedicated to means of egress requirements. Accessible Means of Egress is located in Section 1003.2.13 in the 2000 edition and Section 1007 in the 2003 edition. The basic requirements in the 2000 and 2003 editions are the same. A decision to break Chapter 10 into shorter sections for ease of use led to renumbering of that chapter. In the 2003 edition, vertical lines in the margins indicate that a requirement has been revised from the 2000 edition or is new to 2003 IBC text.

WHY REFERENCE A BUILDING CODE FOR THESE REQUIREMENTS?

Model building codes, since their inception, have had as a main focus the issues of public health and safety, including adequate egress. The ICC has a long history of experience and expertise in addressing these issues. By utilizing this expertise, the ADA/ABA Guidelines have avoided “reinventing the wheel” and potential conflicts between federal requirements and nationally recognized building construction requirements.

Architects, engineers, and contractors have historically relied on the ICC’s model codes to provide minimum requirements. Requirements in the codes are addressed during the design process, where it is easier and more cost effective to correct errors. Higher levels of compliance with accessibility requirements are achieved through local review and inspections performed by the code official. Finding problems after

the building is occupied can lead to expensive retrofits as well as delays in use of the building.

Model codes are continually updated to take advantage of new ideas and technologies. For example, the ICC has been participating in a series of workshops with fire fighters, elevator manufacturers, accessibility groups, and other interested parties to investigate options for using elevators more extensively for means of egress, particularly in high-rise buildings. A new Code Technology Committee, that includes a representative from the Access Board, will be part of ICC’s efforts to continue to coordinate with the new ADA/ABA Guidelines.

ARE THERE OTHER ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS IN THE IBC?

Yes. While some accessibility items have been mainstreamed into the general egress requirements (e.g., accessible means of egress and ramps in Chapter 10), Chapter 11 specifically addresses requirements concerned with accessibility into and throughout spaces, buildings and sites. The IBC also references the technical standard, ICC/ANSI A117.1, Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities.

ARE THERE MORE ACTIONS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE?

A goal of the ICC is to meet or exceed federal regulations via the accessibility requirements found in the ICC codes. The ICC has been working with the Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Compliance Board (a.k.a. Access Board), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and many other groups interested in accessibility through the code change process. All ICC code changes are through a public hearing process. Any individual, company, or organization, can propose a code change through this process.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
www.iccsafe.org/accessibility