

STATE BUILDING CODE INTERPRETATION NO. I-06-00

February 22, 2000

The following is offered in response to your letter to me regarding the provisions of the CABO One and Two Family Dwelling Code as they would apply to a flight of exterior stairs (that are part of the path of egress travel) built in 1990. The applicable code for this time period is the 1986 edition of the CABO One and Two Family Dwelling Code portion of the 1989 State Building Code. The specific section about which you ask is section R-215 that concerns handrail and guardrail requirements. Please note that the following information is specific to the 1989 State Building Code.

The scenario you describe is a set of wooden exterior steps that are: part of the means of egress; five risers in height; ranging in width from 45 inches to 47 ½ inches; the ground level on both sides of the stairs slopes to closely follow the angle of the stairs; and there is a handrail on one side of the stairs with a top rail (gripping surface) consisting of a flat 2x6 with a horizontal cross section of 5 ½ inches.

Question 1: Given the scenario described above, are guardrails required on the stairway? (under the 1989 State Building Code)

Answer 1: No. Section 215.1 of the referenced code states in part, "Open sides of stairs with a total rise of more than 30 inches above the floor or grade below shall have guardrails." The stairs you describe, due to the fact that the grade slopes to follow the angle of the stairs, never have a point where the dimension from tread surface to grade exceeds 30 inches; therefore guardrails are not required.

Question 2: Is the handrail described code compliant? (under the 1989 State Building Code)

Answer 2: Assuming that the height to the top of the handrail is between 30 and 34 inches, the handrail was code compliant at the time of construction. The code in effect required a handrail on at least one side of stairways of four or more risers. There was no information contained in the 1986 CABO Code regarding the profile of the handrail itself with respect to graspability. Therefore, a 2x6 on the flat, although not code compliant under the current 1999 State Building Code was acceptable under the 1989 State Building Code in effect at the time of construction.