

Seattle Permits

—part of a multi-departmental series on City services & permitting

Fire Escape Confidence Testing

Updated January 2019

Fire escape stairs may be used during emergencies by both building occupants and firefighters. Many fire escape stairs in Seattle were built in the early 1900's. To assure the safety of their use from year to year the Seattle Fire Code Section 1104.16.5.1 requires fire escape stairs to be checked every five years.

1. The examination shall be performed by or conducted under the direct supervision of a professional engineer, licensed by the state of Washington. The systems test report must be stamped, dated and signed with the professional engineer's stamp. A copy of the final report must be maintained on the premises for a minimum of 10 years. There are professional testing agencies listed in various directories. Check for companies listed under fire escapes and fire protection. To search for a licensed structural engineer in Washington State by name or county, go to the Washington State Department of Licensing web site at <https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/bpdlicensequery/>.
2. The entire fire escape stairs must be checked for rust, and painted if needed. Hand rails must be physically checked for integrity. Loose bolts, grates, and framework should be tightened, repaired, or replaced as necessary. The ladder must be checked for unauthorized modification and proper function. Building codes under which fire escapes were installed normally require that the ladder extend from a point not more than nine feet above the ground to at least two feet above the roof or parapet.
3. Any deficiencies shall be repaired in accordance with the requirements of the Seattle Fire Code and the Seattle Building Code. Building permits may be required from the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI). For information on SDCI requirements, call (206) 684-8850 or visit their website at <http://www.seattle.gov/sdci>.

4. Systems testing and reporting requirements are included in Seattle Fire Code Administrative Rule 11.01.18. The owner is responsible for maintaining their systems in accordance with the Seattle Fire Code and national standards. To view Administrative Rule 11.01.18, visit: <http://www.seattle.gov/fire/firecode>.
5. Fire escape stairs must display a service tag made of plastic, 9" x 17", which must be attached to the fire escape on the exterior of the lowest landing. This allows the tag to be easily read by anyone who may use the fire escape for maintenance and/or emergency evacuation.
6. Any removal of fire escapes must be done under permit from SDCI. The building owner is required to provide the Seattle Fire Department with a copy of the SDCI permit to remove the fire escape.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER: This Client Assistance Memo (CAM) should not be used as a substitute for codes and regulations. Individuals are responsible for compliance with all code and rule requirements, whether or not described in this CAM.

