

## INTERPRETIVE MEMORANDUM

2000-8

TO: Licensed Architects & Engineers  
Licensed Sprinkler Contractors  
Plan Review Staff

FROM: Henry C. Reed, Sr., Architect Supervisor  
Jean Carter, Architect Supervisor  
Don Zeringue, Architect Supervisor

APPROVED BY: Jerry W. Jones  
Deputy Assistant Secretary/Chief Architect

RE: Apartments/Equivalency to Sprinkler System

DATE: March 24, 2000

This office has recently issued an appeal determination for an apartment occupancy which we will hereby convert to an Interpretive Memorandum.

**Issue:** NFPA 101:18-3.5.2 states that all buildings shall be protected throughout by an approved, supervised automatic sprinkler system installed in accordance with 18-3.5.1.

Three exceptions are offered to this section. Exception (b) states that a sprinkler system would not be required where “direct access to an outside stair (is provided) complying with 5-2.2 that serves a maximum of two units both of which are located on the same floor.” For example, a typical apartment occupancy design may place 4 residential units on the same floor served by two remote exit stairs accessed from an exterior balcony (six units would require three stairs, eight units would require four stairs, etc). This office will now interpret these typical conditions as an equivalent means of complying with Exception (b) to 101:18-3.5.2. A sprinkler system would not be required for buildings designed in this manner. (The illustrations provided describe typical acceptable designs and other special conditions.)

This interpretation is based on the following analogy:

In an alternative design, a cross corridor wall or balcony wall could divide the apartment units into groups of two apartments such that each exit stair would serve a maximum of two apartments. By Life Safety Code requirements, this cross corridor wall would not be required to provide a fire barrier and would not provide any additional enhanced safety or protection though it would technically satisfy the wording of the code. Therefore, a sprinkler system would not be required.

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Please note the following important aspects of this determination:

1. Stairs shall comply with applicable provisions of 5-2.2, in particular:  
5-2.2.6.4 Protection of Outside Stairs.
2. A single stair serving a maximum of 2 dwelling units only is addressed by this interpretation.  
(Six units would require three stairs, eight units would require four stairs, etc.)
3. This interpretation can be applied to buildings over two stories but stairs will only be allowed to serve a maximum of two units on the same floor. (The stairs from upper floors cannot serve as exits from lower floors).

Please note that 101:16:3.5.2 (extinguishment requirements for hotels ) allows an exception for exterior access arranged in accordance with 5-5.3. A maximum number of dwelling units which are compliant with 5-5.3 is not specified.

DPZ/kmw

cc: Marc Reech, Executive Staff Officer  
Mark Gates, Administrator for Inspections & Arson  
Pat Slaughter, Manager of Fire & Safety and Arson  
Pat Day, Supervisor of Health Care Inspections