

INTERPRETIVE MEMORANDUM 2002 - 08

To: Licensed Architects
Licensed Engineers
Felicia Cooper, Administrator - Inspections
Stephen Gogreve, Manager
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Plan Review Staff

From: Don Zeringue, Chief Architect
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Cynthia Obier, Architect Supervisor
Henry Reed, Architect Supervisor

Approved: Mark Gates,
Deputy Assistant Secretary

Date: April 3, 2002

Re: **Fire Rated Compartmentation for Building Isolation**

BACKGROUND

The 2000 edition of NFPA 101:8.2.2.2 addresses compartmentation “*where required by chapters 12 through 42*”. “*Fire barriers*” forming fire compartments are required by this section to be continuous and comply with Chapter 3 of NFPA 221, *Standard for Fire Walls and Fire Barrier Walls*. Additional requirements for fire barriers are also contained in NFPA 101:8.2.3.

NFPA 101

The term “fire barrier wall” is defined in NFPA 101, and similarly in NFPA 221, as “*A wall, other than a fire wall, that has a fire resistance rating.*” This definition is used in the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code to describe the conditions by which portions of buildings must be separated in order to be considered and classified as separate, independent types of building construction. The term “fire wall” can only be found in the verbiage of the Life Safety Code in the definition of “fire barrier wall” and is referenced loosely and sparingly in the Life Safety Code, Annex code sections.

NFPA 221

NFPA 221:3.1 requires “fire barrier walls” to comply with Chapter 3, Chapter 4, 221:5.1.1 and 221:6.2.1. NFPA 221:5.1.1 describes the conditions for permitting door and window openings in fire barrier walls. NFPA 221:6.2.1 prescribes the conditions for permitting penetrations by heating, ventilating and air-conditioning systems.

CONCLUSION

In summary, regarding life safety, building “compartmentation” is accomplished by the use of “fire barrier walls” (NOT “fire walls”) and may be penetrated by communicating openings and HVAC ducts as prescribed in NFPA 221. Where building compartmentation is considered as an alternative method for determining a level of safety equivalent to that required by the NFPA 101 Life Safety Code, the provisions for “fire barrier walls” shall be sufficient for isolating building sections.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Portions of structures separated by **minimum two hour rated “fire barrier walls”** and possessing an **egress system that is independent** of the remainder of the structure shall be considered separate, independent and isolated buildings for the purposes of imposing life safety code requirements.

This office typically takes guidance from the horizontal exit and stair separation requirements in requiring a 10 foot wall extension at such compartment forming walls terminating at an angle of less than 180° with the building exterior.

This interpretation is not intended to circumvent the requirements enforced by other authorities having jurisdiction. Until such time that the authority of the State Fire Marshal is expanded to include more stringent requirements, “fire barrier walls”, as described in NFPA 221, shall be the maximum extent of fire rated building compartmentation imposed for evaluating building isolation regarding the conditional determinations of equivalency permitted by the NFPA Life Safety Code.

DZ:tm