

Exterior Stairs for Homes

Alberta's Safety System

Alberta Municipal Affairs works in partnership with the Safety Codes Council, municipalities, corporations, agencies, and other organizations, to deliver effective community-focused public safety programs and services to Albertans.

Required Exterior Landings

Landings make stairs safer to use by breaking up tall flights of stairs to allow the user to rest. They also provide an adequate surface for users to change direction when entering or exiting a flight of stairs.

A landing shall be provided:

- at the top and bottom of each flight of interior and exterior stairs, including stairs in garages;
- at the top and bottom of every ramp with a slope greater than 1 in 50;
- where a doorway opens onto a stair or ramp;
- where a ramp opens onto a stair; and
- where a stair opens onto a ramp.

A landing may be omitted at the top of an exterior flight serving a secondary entrance to a single home, not including entrances from attached garages, provided:

- the stair does not contain more than three risers;
- the principal door is a sliding door or swings away from the stair; and
- a storm or screen door, which swings over the stair is equipped with hardware to hold it open.

Do you need a permit?

Check with your municipality to find out what permits you need or contact Municipal Affairs to find the permit provider in your area. Make sure you get your permit(s) before starting your project.

Importance of permits

The *Safety Codes Act* requires that permits in Alberta be obtained prior to commencing work on any buildings covered by the Alberta Building and Fire Codes, the Canadian Electrical Code, the Gas Code, or the National Plumbing Code.

Permits are part of a process to access compliance to a minimum standard of construction safety for the benefit of all Albertans. If construction projects are undertaken without required permits, the owner may be subject to penalties and extra costs incurred to bring a project into compliance.

As the property owner, you are responsible to obtain all necessary permits. A contractor can look after this on your behalf; however, you should specify in writing, who will get the required permits. Some jurisdictions may require a letter of authorization before a contractor can apply for permit(s) on your behalf.

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Exterior Stair Construction

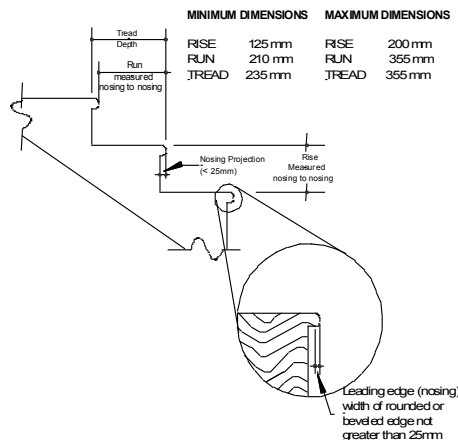
To protect people near your construction project, all doors opening onto the construction of any exterior stairs, landings, and decks must be mechanically secured against opening until handrails and guards are installed as required by the current edition of the Alberta Building Code.

The **rise** of the stairs should be between 125 mm (5") and 200 mm (8"). This is measured from top of a tread nosing to the top of the next tread nosing or landing.

The **run** should be between 210 mm (8 ¼") and 355mm (14"). Unit run is measured from face of nosing to face of nosing.

Treads should be between 235 mm (9 ¼") and 355 mm (14"). This is measured from the face of the riser to outer edge of the stair nosing.

Having **stair nosing** or the leading edges of treads projecting more than 25 mm (1") beyond the face of the adjacent riser below is a tripping hazard.



NOTE: Exterior wood steps shall not be in direct contact with the ground unless suitably treated with a wood preservative.

Benefits of getting a permit

When you get a permit, certified safety codes officers (inspectors) will:

- give you expert advice,
- review your plans to find any potential problems,
- inspect your project, and
- make sure your project meets the Alberta Building Code.

Making changes at the planning stage can save you money, rather than making costly corrections after construction. Certified safety codes officers will give you an inspection report(s) and follow-up on deficiencies to make sure your project is safe and in compliance.

Where do you get a permit?

Permits are available through municipalities that administer the *Safety Codes Act* and through agencies that provide inspection services on behalf of municipalities or the province. If you don't know whether your municipality issues permits, contact the Alberta Safety Codes Authority (ASCA) at 1-877-413-0099 or visit safetycodes.ab.ca/ASCA.

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Required Handrails

Handrails serve several purposes including providing assistance with normal balance and most critically, they offer a continuous handhold to support persons who may stumble on the stair. The guidance and support



provided by handrails is particularly important at the beginning and end of ramps and flights of stairs and at changes in direction such as at landings and winders. Functional handrails shall be constructed to be continually graspable along their entire length.

Where an exterior stair has more than three (3) risers, a handrail is required on one side of the stair. Outside stairs with three risers or less do not require handrails.

Handrails are required to protect the open sides of stairs where the height of the top of the stairs is 600 mm (24") high or higher. These railings must measure at least 900 mm (36") above the stair tread's outer edge to ensure safe, easy use of the railing.

NOTE: In those cases where a stair also requires a guardrail, a reasonable solution is to provide a guardrail which also acts as a handrail.

Applying for a building permit

When applying for a building permit, you must submit the following information to your local authority:

- details of the project or occupancy to be covered by the permit.
- details of the land on which the project will be located, including a description that will easily identify and locate the building lot.
- plans, specifications and other documents showing, in detail, the proposed occupancy of all parts of the building, state the value of the proposed project.
- state the names, addresses and phone numbers of the project owner, designer and contractor.

Hire qualified tradespeople

Specific trades such as electricians, plumbers and gasfitters must be certified to work in Alberta. To find out if the tradespeople you are hiring need to be certified in Alberta or to verify an individual's status, you may contact *The Apprenticeship and Industry Training* office by calling 310-0000.

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Required Guards

Guards provide a protective barrier around openings in floors or at the open sides of stairs, landings, balconies, mezzanines, galleries, or raised walkways to prevent accidental falls from one level to another.

Where there is no wall and there is a difference in elevation of 600 mm (24") or more between two floors or between a floor and the next lower surface, the risk of injury in a fall is sufficient to warrant the installation of guards to reduce the danger of a fall.

Guards shall have a non-climbable inside surface and cannot be constructed with horizontal or near-horizontal members between balusters such that a ladder effect is achieved. This can be very tempting for young children to climb, exposing themselves to risk of falling over the guard.



Horizontal members are not permitted between 140 mm (5 ½") and 900mm (36") above the finished floor surface.




NOTE: Openings in these guards cannot be large enough to allow the passage of a ball 100 mm (4") in diameter.

These brochures may be updated periodically. They have no legal status and cannot be used as an official interpretation of the various bylaws, codes and regulations currently in effect.

More information:




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Alberta Safety Codes Authority (ASCA)

 Toll-free within Alberta:
1-877-413-0099
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Call (or click) before you dig!

Alberta One Call will locate utility lines on your property. Call or click before you start any project that involves digging in your yard. Alberta One Call will locate gas, water, electricity, drainage, telephone and cable TV lines. Allow at least two full working days for Alberta One Call to locate your utility lines.