



NATIONAL  
MULTIFAMILY  
HOUSING  
COUNCIL



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# ICC Model Code Retrofitting Requirements

The International Code Council (ICC) model building codes generally only apply to new construction, meaning newly built properties are subject to the code in force at the time of permitting. Barring any significant repair or alteration, which would trigger a compliance update, they are generally not required to be retrofitted to meet higher or different standards enacted in future versions of the code adopted after the property is put in service.

However, there are two codes that apply to existing properties that could, in certain circumstances, require retrofitting to comply with them: the International Fire Code (IFC) and International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC).

This document reviews, by code and code vintage, the specific provisions that could require retrofits of existing properties.

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# IFC Provisions

## 2000 to 2003 IFC

### Installation of Smoke Alarms in Dwelling Units

Existing buildings not already provided with single-station smoke alarms are required to install smoke alarms on the ceiling outside of bedrooms, on the ceiling of bedrooms and on each story of a dwelling unit. Interconnection is not required in buildings not undergoing alterations, repairs or construction of any kind. Smoke alarms in existing buildings are permitted to be battery powered and are not required to be interconnected where alteration or repairs do not result in the removal of interior finishes (Section 907.3.2).

### Installation of Fire Alarm Systems

Fire alarm systems are required in existing buildings more than three stories in height or with more than 16 dwelling units. The fire alarm is not required in buildings less than three stories and with less than 16-dwelling units, if:

- the units are separated by a fire-resistance rating of not less than .75 hours, and each dwelling unit has either its own independent exit or its own independent stairway or ramp discharging at grade; or
- the building has an approved supervised automatic sprinkler system in accordance with NFPA 13 or NFPA 13R; or
- the building does not have interior corridors (Section 907.3.1.7).

This is not a new requirement for many jurisdictions, as the requirement was included in the codes prior to the creation of the ICC codes.

## 2003 to 2006 IFC

### Fire Safety and Evacuation Drills

Fire safety and evacuation drills are required in Group R-2 college and university buildings (Section 404.2). The drills are required four times a year (Section 405.2 and Table 405.2). The first drill is required to be conducted within 10 days of the beginning of classes (Section 408.3) and future drills are to be conducted at various times throughout the school year (Section 408.3).

### Recall Fire Protection Equipment

Any fire protection system component regulated by the code that is recalled is to be replaced, and the owner is required to notify the fire code official (Section 901.9).

### Portable Fire Extinguishers

Portable fire extinguishers have been required in R-2 occupancies since the inception of the ICC codes; however, the 2006 requirements were modified to include existing properties. Since this provision has been included in the code from the onset, this would not be a new requirement to properties already in compliance with the code (Section 906.1).

### Two-way Communication Systems in Areas of Refuge

Systems are required to be tested yearly in the presence of the fire code official (Section 1028.7).

## 2006 to 2009 IFC

No substantive changes were made other than moving the provisions for existing buildings from exceptions in the body of the code to *Chapter 46 Construction Requirements for Existing Buildings*.

## 2009 to 2012 IFC

### Emergency Response Radio Coverage

New provisions were included to ensure that all buildings, including the interiors, have emergency radio coverage. If they do not, property owners must install repeaters so public safety personnel radios will work (Section 1103.2). Note: This is typically more of a problem for high-rise properties built from steel and concrete; wood-frame buildings do not interfere with the reception of emergency response radio signals.

### Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Carbon monoxide alarms that comply with UL 2034 must be installed and maintained in accordance with NFPA 720. The alarms are only required if the building contains a fuel-burning appliance or an attached garage other than an open parking garage or enclosed parking garage that is

# IFC Provisions

ventilated in accordance with the International Mechanical Code Section 404 (Section 1103.9).

## **2012 to 2015 IFC**

### **Elevator Emergency Operations**

Exceptions have been added to the requirement that all existing elevators with a travel distance of 25 feet or more need to comply with ASME A17.1. The exceptions concern exempting elevators with fire doors or buildings with sprinkler systems (NFPA 13 or 13R).

### **Exit Access Stairways**

New requirements for protection of exit access stairways with one-hour fire-resistance rated construction, if they serve more than two stories, are not protected with an NFPA 13 sprinkler system or are within an atrium or serve an atrium.

### **Guard Height**

The requirement that guards on stairs be at least 30 inches high has been extended to include ramps.

# IPMC Provisions

## 2000 to 2003 IPMC

### Swimming Pools

New requirement added for maintenance of swimming pools and spas, including provisions for fencing and gates (Section 303).

### Door, Window and Basement Locks

New requirement added for deadbolts on doors, window latches on windows within six feet of the ground and locking of basement hatchway (Sections 304.18.1, 304.18.2 and 304.18.3).

### Handrails and Guards

Added a requirement that stairs with more than four risers be required to have a handrail, and decks more than 30 inches above the floor or grade below must have guards (Section 306).

### Discarded Refrigerators

Doors must be removed (Section 307.2.2).

### Fire Protection Systems

Provisions added that fire protection systems be maintained (Section 704.1).

### Smoke Alarms

Provisions concerning the installation of smoke alarms that were noted as being added to the IFC in 2003 were also added to the IPMC (Section 704.1).

## 2003 to 2006 IPMC

### Door Locks

Provisions requiring door locks (added in 2003) were modified to exclude the use of sliding bolts (Section 304.18.1).

## 2006 to 2009 IPMC

### Dangerous Structures or Premises

Dangerous structures definitions were added to the code. These include doors, aisles, passageways, stairs, walking surfaces and damage as a result of fire, earthquake, wind, flood, deterioration, etc. (Section 108.1.5).

### Disconnection of Services

Code officials were given authority to order the disconnection of services in cases of emergency (Section 108.2.1).

### Abatement Methods

Code officials were given the authority to require abatement of properties considered to be unsafe (Section 108.6).

### Unsafe Conditions

A new section was added on unsafe conditions that must be repaired, including structural members, anchorage of floor and roofs, stairs, landings, balconies and foundation systems that have failed (Section 305.1).

### Component Serviceability

New section added on maintenance of equipment and building components added (Section 306).

### Pest Elimination

Owners are responsible for eliminating pests and rodents in common areas. Infestations caused by the resident are the responsibility of the resident (Section 309.4).

### Public Toilet Rooms

Public toilet rooms are required to be maintained (Section 502.5).

### Abatement of Electrical Hazards

New section dealing with electrical hazards and associated with electrical equipment and wiring was added (Section 604.3.1).

## 2009 to 2012 IPMC

No new requirements added impacting apartments.

## 2012 to 2015 IPMC

No new requirements added impacting apartments.

The information discussed in this document is general in nature and is not intended to be legal advice. It is intended to assist owners and managers in understanding this issue area, but it may not apply to the specific fact circumstances or business situations of all owners and managers. For specific legal advice, consult your attorney.