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SAMANTHA D. HORN
DIRECTOR

DATE: 1/15/2026

TO: Members of the Public and Interested Parties

CC: Technical Building Codes and Standards Board

CC: Samantha Horn, Director of Maine Office of Community Affairs

FROM: Greg Gilbert, State Building Official

SUBJECT: Multifamily Single Egress Stair Conflict Resolution

Purpose:

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 101 allows for stairs up to 4 stories as a single means of egress, with stipulations, for residential multi-family structures. The International Building Code (IBC) allows for a single egress stair in residential multi-family structures up to 3 stories under specific guidelines. This conflict was raised by a working group resulting from LD 1375. The working group requested that the Technical Building Codes and Standards Board (hereafter, the Board), through the State Fire Marshal's Office, provide a resolution. The statutory duties of the board task them with finding a solution.

Background: Residential Single Stair Egress in IBC vs NFPA:

The 2021 IBC allows up to 3 stories above the first floor above grade-plane in Multifamily Residential Dwelling Structures provided that:

- Not more than 4 dwelling units per floor
- Exit access travel distance not greater than 125ft may have single access from the basement, first floor, second floor and third floor
- Provided with a NFPA 13 (IBC 903.3.1.1) or NFPA 13R (IBC 903.3.1.2) sprinkler system
- Provided with emergency escape and rescue openings.
- Interior exit stairs shall have a fire-resistance rating of not less than 2 hours connecting four stories or more and not less than 1 hour connecting less than four stories.



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The 2018 NFPA 101 allows up to 4 stories above the lowest level of exit discharge in Multifamily Residential Dwelling Structures provided that:

- Not more than four dwelling units per story
- Protected throughout by automatic sprinklers (complying with NFPA 13R or NFPA 13)
- The stair does not serve more than ½ story below level of exit discharge
- Travel distance from the dwelling unit entrance door to the exit is less than or equal to 35 ft (10.7 m)
- The exit stair is separated by minimum 1-hour fire barriers and 1-hour fire doors
- Corridor access to exits is separated by 1-hr fire barriers (20-minute doors)
- Minimum ½-hour fire barrier exists between apartments

Background: Application of the Conflict Resolution Framework:

MUBEC's administrative rule provides the Board with significant procedural flexibility in resolving conflicts between codes. When resolving conflicts, the Board may: (1) use the process outlined in rule; (2) use the "decision tree" flow chart; or (3) consider other approaches to resolving conflicts. See 08-003 C.M.R. Ch. 2, §12(2).

Summary:

The Board determined that there is a conflict between the single exit requirements in the 2021 IBC section 1006, and the 2018 NFPA 101, section 30.2.4.

The conflict between the two codes is the difference in the maximum number of stories a building can have when allowing the use of a single exit stair and how to determine the level where those levels start. IBC permits a single exit stair for up to three-story buildings measured from the lowest level above grade-plane. NFPA specifies the use of a single exit stair for buildings up to four-stories and specifies that the stories must be measured from the lowest level of exit discharge. The Board acknowledges that the current IBC standards are more restrictive than the NFPA standards when utilizing a single-stair exit.

Below is the alternative approach the Board used to resolve the conflict between MUBEC and NFPA regarding single-stair exits in certain residential buildings.

Conclusion:

The Board accepted an alternative conflict resolution process as allowed by 08-003 C.M.R. Ch. 2, §12(2) in which the resolution of the conflict between the 2021 IBC and 2018 NFPA 101 is to modify the sections of the IBC applying the story allowance of single stair egress



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in multifamily apartments to reflect requirements similar the NFPA 101's standards. However, the Board is not changing the IBC stairwell fire separation requirement. The referred to alternative conflict resolution process is outlined in the December 15th 2025 "Single Stair Egress" memo to the Technical Building Codes and Standards Board. See Appendix A for updated section language.

References:

International Code Council's 2021 Edition of the International Building Code

National Fire Protection Association' 2018 Edition of NFPA 101 Life Safety Code

08-003 C.M.R. Ch. 2 – MUBEC: Administration

The Pew Charitable Trusts' States Advance Single-Stairway Reforms to Expand Housing Report

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Gilbert".

Greg Gilbert,
State Building Official
Maine Office of Community Affairs

Single Stair Egress Memo - Appendix: A

2021 IBC Chap 10

Purpose: Eliminate Conflict between IBC and NFPA relative to Single Exits from certain Apartment Buildings

Proposed Modification: Amend MUBEC Chapter 4, add exception after Section 1006.3.4 condition 1:

13. Section 1006.3.4

Insert after 1. The *occupant load*, number of *dwelling units* and exit access travel distance do not exceed the values in Table 1006.3.4(1) or 1006.3.4(2).

“Exception: R-2 dwelling unit occupancies that comply with section 30.2.4.6 of NFPA 101 adopted pursuant to Title 25 M.R.S. §§ 2452 and 2465”

“1006.3.4 Single exits. A single *exit* or access to a single *exit* shall be permitted from any *story* or occupied roof where one of the following conditions exists:

1. The *occupant load*, number of *dwelling units* and exit access travel distance do not exceed the values in Table 1006.3.4(1) or 1006.3.4(2).

Exception: R-2 dwelling unit occupancies that comply with section 30.2.4.6 of NFPA 101 adopted pursuant to Title 25 M.R.S. §§ 2452 and 2465

2. Rooms, areas and spaces complying with Section 1006.2.1 with *exits* that discharge directly to the exterior at the *level of exit discharge*, are permitted to have one *exit* or access to a single *exit*.”

Proposed Modification: Amend MUBEC Chapter 4, Table 1006.3.4 (1) to allow a single exit for certain apartment buildings up to four stories:

14. TABLE 1006.3.4(1)

Delete “or” from column 1 row 1;

Insert after second “,” and Insert after third “or fourth”

Delete “Fourth” from Column 1 row 2;

Insert before story, “Fifth”

TABLE 1006.3.4(1) STORIES WITH ONE EXIT OR ACCESS TO ONE EXIT FOR R-2 OCCUPANCIES

STORY	OCCUPANCY	MAXIMUM NUMBER OF DWELLING UNITS	MAXIMUM EXIT ACCESS TRAVEL DISTANCE
Basement, first, second, or third <u>or fourth</u> story above grade plane <u>lowest level of exit discharge</u>	R-2 ^{a, b}	4 dwelling units	125 feet
Fourth <u>Fifth</u> story above grade plane <u>lowest level of exit discharge</u> and higher	NP	NA	NA

For SI: 1 foot = 304.8 mm.

NP = Not Permitted.

NA = Not Applicable.

a. Buildings classified as Group R-2 equipped throughout with an automatic sprinkler system in accordance with [Section 903.3.1.1](#) or [903.3.1.2](#) and provided with emergency escape and rescue openings in accordance with [Section 1031](#).

b. This table is used for R-2 occupancies consisting of dwelling units. For R-2 occupancies consisting of sleeping units, use [Table 1006.3.4\(2\)](#).