

CHAPTER 31  
FIRE ESCAPES  
S. F. 45

AN ACT to amend, revise, and codify chapter twelve (12) of title five (5) of the compiled code of Iowa, and section ten hundred sixty-four (1064) of the supplement to said code, relating to fire escapes and means of escape from fire.

Be It Enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa:

That chapter twelve (12) of title five (5) of the compiled Code of Iowa, and section ten hundred sixty-four (1064) of the supplement to said Code are amended, revised, and codified to read as follows:

CHAPTER 12

FIRE ESCAPES AND OTHER MEANS OF ESCAPE FROM FIRE

Section 1. Fire escapes--what buildings to be equipped with. All buildings, structures, and enclosures of three (3) or more stories in height, and such other buildings of less number of stories as are in this chapter specially designated, shall be equipped with such protection against fire, and means of escape therefrom, as in this chapter provided.

Sec. 2. Terms defined. The word "building" as used in this chapter shall include all structures or enclosures of each of the classes mentioned or referred to herein. The word "story" shall include a basement story when such basement story is on the average five (5) feet or more above the ground.

Sec. 3. Number of fire escapes required--where placed. Every building, structure, or enclosure of three (3) or more stories, and every schoolhouse of two (2) stories and not provided with two (2) stairways located approximately at each end of the hallway in the second story, and every structure having a stage, and every theater or opera house of more than one (1) story, or having balconies or galleries, shall have at least the number of fire escapes of the kind prescribed by law as determined by the following formula:

Number of fire escapes shall equal C times P.

P equals the average maximum number of persons on the story with the highest number above the first story

C is a coefficient and is fixed, and shall be taken for the various classes of buildings as follows:

1. Buildings having wooden or combustible walls, C equals .020.
2. Buildings having brick or combustible walls with combustible interior, C equals .014.
3. Buildings having brick or incombustible walls and incombustible roof and slow burning construction, C equals .012.
4. Buildings of fireproof construction throughout, C equals .007.
5. Buildings of wooden or combustible walls equipped with efficient water sprinkler system, C equals .014.
6. Buildings having brick or incombustible walls with combustible interior equipped with efficient water sprinkler system, C equals .008.
7. Buildings having brick or incombustible walls and incombustible roof and slow burning construction equipped with efficient water sprinkler system, C equals .006.
8. Fireproof buildings equipped with efficient water sprinkler system, C equals .003.

When the result of the said formula is one (1) or any fraction thereof, the number of escapes shall be one (1). The number of additional escapes required shall include any fraction as a unit, except when such fraction shall be thirty-three hundredths (.33) or less, in which case the fraction may be dropped if permitted by the inspector.

Sec. 4. Regulations as to location of fire escapes and exits. The following regulations as to location of fire escapes and exits are hereby established:

1. The first fire escape required by law shall be placed as far as possible from the existing inside stairway or passage to the lower floors of the building, taking into account the hazard and the path or route of access to the escape from such stairway.

2. The distance to the nearest fire escape from any inside stairway or passage to the lower floor shall not exceed two hundred (200) feet by way of the path or route of access to such fire escape from such stairway or passage.

3. Additional fire escapes to those otherwise provided by law shall be provided wherever it is necessary to pass within twenty feet of any stairway or elevator shaft from any portion of the building more than twenty feet from such stairway or shaft to reach the fire escape required by the provisions of law and where there are peculiar, unusual or extreme hazards additional fire escapes may be required by those authorized by law to regulate and fix the number and requirements of fire escapes.

4. When the inspector shall deem it necessary on account of the height of any building or on account of the number of persons ordinarily occupying said building, either permanently or temporarily in the course of business, such building shall be equipped with a sufficient number of fire escapes to permit the exit of all occupants within the following periods of time:

a. Buildings with wooden or combustible walls, two (2) minutes.

b. Buildings having brick or incombustible walls with combustible interior, three (3) minutes.

c. Buildings having brick or incombustible walls and incombustible roof and slow burning interior construction, four (4) minutes.

d. Buildings of fire proof construction throughout, fifteen (15) minutes; or less period of time if hazard of merchantable contents of such building may so require.

In estimating the period of time required the rate of descent on the fire escapes shall not be taken in excess of one and five-tenths (1.5) feet of vertical distance, or height, per second, when said fire escapes are fully loaded, which rate of descent shall be estimated to permit the exit of not to exceed one (1) person per second; but the time of complete exit as herein provided may be increased where efficient sprinkler systems are installed, such increase of time to be determined by the character and efficiency of the sprinkling system unless peculiar or unusual hazards exist.

Sec. 5. Fire escapes--how constructed--classes of. All fire escapes shall be constructed as described in the following classifications:

Class A. Fire escapes of this class shall consist of those more safe and efficient than outside ladders and stairways and which shall have been approved as such by the labor commissioner, and may include inside stairways and means of escape in fireproof buildings when approved by said commissioner.

Class B. Fire escapes of this class shall consist of a suitable outside stairway of not less than twenty-two (22) inches clear width of steel or wrought iron constructed with platform and with stationary stairway carried down to within six and one-half (6 1/2) feet of the ground, or with a drop or counterbalanced stairway from the second story platform or balcony to the ground.

Class C. Fire escapes of this class shall consist of at least one (1) ladder, not less than eighteen (18) inches in width, of steel or wrought iron construction, of sufficient size and strength for safety, attached to the outside walls of the building and provided with platforms of steel or wrought iron inclosed by suitable railings of such dimensions and in such proximity to the windows of each story above the first as to render access to the ladder from each story easy and safe, the said ladder to extend to within six and one-half (6 1/2) feet of the ground or to be provided with a drop ladder hung at the second story in such a manner that it can be easily lowered for use.

1. All of the above classes of fire escapes shall be of suitable material, construction, arrangement, and location to make the same safe and efficient and no fire escape of a higher class shall be less safe and efficient than one of a lower class and the provisions of each lower class with respect to platform, access to windows and openings, and sufficiency of strength shall apply to the upper class except where allowed to be modified by those having authority.

2. All fire escapes reaching the top floor shall have suitable extensions reaching from the upper platform to safe landing on the roof of the building; but the commissioner may waive this provision when on examination he finds that such ladder would be an element of danger.

3. All fire escapes of any of the foregoing classes shall have such windows or openings leading to the platform or balconies of the same as shall be necessary to make the same safe and efficient, and all routes or paths of access to said fire escapes shall be safe and sufficient, with all doors of rooms leading to fire escapes one-half (1/2) glass and equipped with mortise latches or equivalent so that the same may be easily and quickly opened by breaking the glass and turning the latches from the inside of the doors, all so as to render access to the fire escape from each floor above the first easy and safe. No window or door leading to the platform of a fire escape shall be fastened against exit.

4. The attachment of all fire escapes shall be made in a thorough and substantial manner and sufficient to carry the full load that may be placed on said fire escapes when the same are crowded, with a factor of safety of not less than four (4).

5. Suitable signs indicating the location of fire escapes shall be posted at all entrances to elevators, stairways, landings, and in all rooms.

6. In all buildings which are used for lodging or sleeping purposes, and in opera houses, theaters, and public assembly halls, and other buildings occupied or used at night where, in the judgment of the commissioner, this provision should apply, red lights shall be maintained at night or when the buildings are darkened to indicate the place or opening through which access to the fire escape is obtained. Red lights shall not be used for lighting purposes in such buildings at locations where they may be mistaken for an exit light.

Sec. 7. Class of escapes required--mandatory and permissible kinds--stairways permitted.

1. Hotels, lodging houses, tenements, apartment buildings, schools, retail or department stores, seminaries, college buildings, office buildings, hospitals, asylums, opera houses, theaters, assembly halls, and factories required by law to be equipped with fire escapes shall be equipped with those of class "A" or class "B". All other buildings and structures required to be equipped with fire escapes shall be equipped with those of class "A", "B", or "C", or with a combination of such classes.

2. Class "C" shall not be used on any building over three (3) stories in height in which more than five (5) persons are at any one time allowed upon any one (1) of the floors above said third story nor where any of the persons allowed upon any floor above the third story are females or minors; but the labor commissioner may under peculiar conditions and where the hazards are not great:

a. Permit fire escapes of class "C" to be used on buildings of more than three (3) stories, but when ladder fire escapes are permitted on buildings more than three (3) stories in height the ladders thereof must offset at the platforms and must not continue in the same line for more than one (1) story.

b. Permit fire escapes of class "C" or other approved means of escape to be used on an ordinary dwelling of not more than three (3) stories in height and temporarily used in part for lodging purposes when not more than five (5) persons, none of whom are under sixteen years of age, occupy the third floor.

3. Where stairways not less than forty-four (44) inches in clear width are provided they shall be taken as the equivalent of two (2) or more single stairways in proportion to their width, provided the means of escape and efficiency and safety of said escapes are not thereby diminished.

Sec. 8. Doors to open outward--exits. The entrance and exit doors of all hotels, churches, lodge halls, courthouses, assembly halls, theaters, opera houses, colleges, public schoolhouses, and other structures where the hazard is deemed sufficient by the inspector, and the entrance doors to all class and assembly rooms in public school buildings, shall open outward and shall not be fastened against exit or so the same can not be easily opened from within.

Sec. 9. Inspector to determine number and size of exits. Inspectors shall, subject to the final decision of the commissioner, have power to determine the number and size of exits from all theaters, opera houses, and assembly halls and from other buildings having one or more balconies, the location of such exits with reference to fire escapes, and shall require that no exit shall be fastened so as to prevent free passage from the building.

Sec. 11. Labor commissioner--supervision of fire escapes. The labor commissioner, except when otherwise specially provided by law, shall have general charge and supervision of the inspection and regulation of fire escapes and means of escape and of the enforcement of the law relating thereto, and for this purpose the inspectors named herein, and others upon whom there is imposed by law or ordinance any duty with reference to fire escapes, shall be subject to his direction and to the rules and regulations adopted by such commissioner.

Sec. 12. Standard specifications for fire escapes. The said commissioner shall adopt standard uniform specifications for the various classes of fire escapes provided by law and shall furnish such specifications to all persons who are by law made inspectors of fire escapes and means of escape from fire, and such persons shall keep the same on file in their respective offices.

Sec. 13. Distribution of rules and regulations. The labor commissioner shall make all necessary rules and regulations to carry out the purpose of this law and have the same printed in pamphlet form for distribution; and he shall have the power to approve any and all plans relating to fire escapes of the various classes, and it shall be his duty to see that the same conform to the law, and to make rulings and orders relative thereto, and where any dispute or disagreement arises with respect to the plans and specifications for any fire escape or means of escape from fire, the commissioner shall have the power and authority to determine and pass upon the same and make orders relative thereto.

Sec. 14. Building inspectors--what officers constitute. The building inspector or other officer performing like duties in cities having such officer and if there be no such officer then the chief of the fire department, and if there be no chief of a paid fire department, the mayor of such city or town, or if the building is not within the corporate limits of any city or town, then the chairman of the board of supervisors, shall inspect all fire escapes within respective jurisdictions, except buildings otherwise required by law to be inspected.

Sec. 15. Powers and duties of inspection officers. Such inspection officers shall as often as necessary, and whenever complaint is made, carefully inspect and examine such fire escapes, and such inspection shall include all paths or routes between any interior passage to a lower floor and the opening and means of access to the said fire escapes, and the signs, lights, exits, and means of escape of all buildings required to be equipped with fire escapes and required to have certain exits and means of escape; and upon the complaint of any person that any fire escape, exit or means of escape from fire is being maintained contrary to law, or any rule or regulation relative thereto or relative to protection against fire is being violated, such inspector shall examine into the conditions complained of and determine what, if any, requirements should be made in relation thereto, and shall have power to make all reasonable requirements and regulations in conformity with the law and to determine all matters with respect to fire escapes, protection from fire, and means of escape from buildings.

Sec. 16. Limitation of powers. Said inspectors, however, shall be subject to the rules and under the direction of the department of labor, and their duties shall not conflict with the duties of inspection by the labor commissioner, the engineer of the department of public health, and their assistants or deputies.

Sec. 17. Inspectors to serve notice on owner. It shall be the duty of any inspector required by law to inspect fire escapes or means of escape from fire to serve or cause to be served a written notice in behalf of the state of Iowa upon the owner, if he be a resident of the county in which the buildings are situated, or if he be a nonresident of such county, then upon his agent or lessee, that the buildings are not provided with fire escapes in accordance with the provisions of this act, or that the fire escapes or means of escape from fire are defective, unsafe, or dangerous, notifying such owner of such lack of fire escapes, condition of the building, defective, dangerous, or unsafe means of escape from fire or any matter relating thereto, and notifying him to comply with the law and requirements of the inspector or commissioner within sixty (60) days after the service of such notice; but the time of such notice may be extended by the labor commissioner if necessary.

Sec. 18. Owner's right of appeal to commissioner. The owner, by himself, his agent, or lessee, may appeal from the action or requirement of any inspector at any time within sixty (60) days after the service of such notice by a written communication addressed to said commissioner, setting forth such objections as he may have to the complaint, requirement, or regulations of such inspector; and it shall be the duty of the commissioner to pass upon and determine all matters of disagreement relating to fire escapes and the means of escape from fire in buildings, and all rules, regulations, findings, and orders made by the commissioner in his discretion, shall be reasonable and not unduly burdensome.

Sec. 19. Violations--penalty..Any person who shall violate any of the provisions of law relating to fire escapes or means of escape from fire, or any owner, agent, or trustee having the full care and control of any building and who has been served with notice as provided herein and who shall, within sixty (60) days of the service of the notice, or within the time as extended by the commissioner, fail and neglect to comply with the requirements of law or of the inspector or the commissioner, or who shall fail, refuse, or neglect to perform any order or requirement fixed by law, or by the labor commissioner, shall be punished by a fine of not less than twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) nor more than one hundred dollars (\$100.00). Each additional week of neglect to comply with such notice, order, or requirement shall constitute a separate offense.

Approved April 5, 1924.