



Professional Property Inspections

NEWSLETTER



ARE YOUR STAIRS AND HANDRAILS SAFE?

In almost every inspection we see stairs or railings missing handrails or balusters (spindles). I think about it like this: picture someone elderly, and in the dark, in icy conditions navigating from the driveway to the top of the stoop without handrails. That is when serious falls can happen. Picture someone climbing up the steps to the second floor, losing balance with nothing to hold onto. Often, basement steps have no handrails or guardrails at all. Picture a toddler playing on a deck chasing the ball for example, without the proper guardrails. These conditions are recipes for injuries. Tripping and falling on stairs is a very common source of injury.

Municipalities typically require guardrails and balusters if the height is more than 30 inches from the ground or floor. Handrails are typically required if there are more than 3 stair treads (which also translates to approximately 30 inches). But our advice is to make your house even safer than that which is required by code. You can't be too careful!

Handrails should be graspable, in other words, you should be able to grab them securely. If your hand can't get around the handrail, it isn't very safe. Handrail should be continuous. You shouldn't have to remove your hand from one handrail and then find the next handrail when traversing steps. That could be enough to cause a fall. The space between balusters should be no more than 4 inches wide to prevent babies' heads from getting stuck. There should be a light switch and light at the bottom and top of the stairs. A single switch should turn on both lights.



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Building codes contain a lot of requirements and dimensions, too many to mention here. But my advice is to take a close look at all your stairs, landings, and balconies to get a gut feel for whether they are safe or not. If you want to get into the details, there is plenty of information on various websites. Or get a licensed and qualified carpenter or general contractor to examine all your stairs, landings, balconies, and decks to make sure they are safe. Think safety, safety, safety!

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