

# What are Building Codes?

## Worksheet

A building code is a set of government-adopted regulations specifying minimum requirements for structural safety, fire egress, accessibility, and health standards that all new construction and major renovations must satisfy.

## Questions

1. What is the primary purpose of building codes?
  - A) To dictate architectural style
  - B) To set minimum safety and performance standards
  - C) To increase construction cost
  - D) To replace the architect's design role
2. What document confirms a finished building is legally safe to occupy?
  - A) Building permit
  - B) Certificate of occupancy
  - C) Zoning map
  - D) Site survey
3. Why do multi-story buildings typically need two separate exit stairways?
  - A) For decoration
  - B) So a blocked exit still leaves an escape route
  - C) To reduce construction cost
  - D) Codes don't require this
4. Who reviews a project's drawings against the code before construction starts?
  - A) The building's future tenants
  - B) The local building department during permit review
  - C) The furniture supplier
  - D) No one - codes are self-certified
5. A new 5-story apartment building is being designed. Why must it include two separate fire-rated exit stairways rather than one?
6. A public library is renovating its entrance. The code requires an accessible route. What must the design include?
7. A house extension adds a bedroom with only one small, high window. What code issue does this raise?
8. Define: What is a building code?
9. Define: What areas do building codes typically regulate?
10. Define: What is a certificate of occupancy?

## Answer Key

1. B) To set minimum safety and performance standards - Codes exist to guarantee a baseline of structural, fire, and health safety - not to control aesthetics.
2. B) Certificate of occupancy - The certificate of occupancy is issued after final inspection confirms code compliance.
3. B) So a blocked exit still leaves an escape route - Redundant egress routes ensure occupants can escape even if one path is blocked, e.g. by fire.
4. B) The local building department during permit review - Local building departments review permit drawings for code compliance before authorizing construction.
5. Building codes require a minimum number of independent means of egress based on occupancy and height/floor area For a multi-story residential building this typically means two remote exits so one stairway blocked by fire still leaves an escape route Without two exits, the design would fail permit review and could not legally be built
6. Accessibility codes (e.g., ADA in the US) require a step-free path from the public way to the main entrance This typically means a ramp or level entry with maximum slope limits (often 1:12) plus accessible door hardware Without it, the renovation permit would be denied regardless of how the entrance looks
7. Residential codes require bedrooms to have an emergency egress window of minimum size and maximum sill height A small, high window likely fails both the minimum opening area and the maximum height-above-floor rule The design must be revised with a larger, lower window before it can pass inspection
8. A legally enforced set of minimum standards governing the safe design, construction, and maintenance of buildings.
9. Structural safety, fire protection and egress, accessibility, health/sanitation, and energy performance.
10. An official document confirming a finished building meets all applicable codes and is safe to occupy.

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