



Means of Egress: Exterior Exit Balconies

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Learning Objective: The student shall be able to describe the conditions that define an exterior egress balcony.

Today's photograph illustrates a design feature common to many occupancies including motels, hotels, condominiums, offices, retail shops and apartments: the exterior egress balcony. In this design, the dwelling or tenant space opens onto an open-air means of egress that provides two or more options leading to an exit.

Since an exterior egress balcony is essentially a three-sided corridor (floor, ceiling and one wall), it must meet the same construction requirements as corridors for width, headroom, dead-ends and projections.

Corridor and Exterior Exit Balcony Requirements

Min. Width		Min. Headroom		Max. Dead End		Projections
44 in	1118 mm	90 in	2286 mm	20 ft*	6096 mm*	Refer to Building Code

* In some institutional occupancies and in some sprinklered business and factory uses, dead-ends may be 50 feet (15 240 mm). Always refer to the legally adopted building or fire code.

Exterior egress balconies must be separated from the interior by fire resistive construction, and doors opening onto the balcony must have the same fire and smoke resistance as corridors. An important exception to this rule exists where the exterior egress balcony has at least two stairs and anyone leaving spaces that open onto a dead-end portion of the balcony is not required to travel past an unprotected opening to reach a stair.

A key feature of the exterior egress balcony is the construction of the side open to the atmosphere. The long side of the egress balcony must be at least 50 percent open, and the open area above the 42-inch (1067 mm) high guards (railing) must be distributed to minimize the accumulation of heat, smoke or toxic gases.



This design is typical of an exterior egress balcony.

For additional information, refer to International Building Code®, Chapter 10, or NFPA 5000, Building Construction and Safety Code®, Chapter 11.

