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Topic: Licensing

Subject: Oregon Fire Code, Appendix L - Oregon State Fire Marshal Clarification
about APD Adult Foster Home Emergency Exits

Applies to (check all that apply):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> All DHS employees | <input type="checkbox"/> County Mental Health Directors |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Area Agencies on Aging | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Services |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Aging and People with Disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> Office of Developmental Disabilities Services(ODDS) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self Sufficiency Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> ODDS Children's Intensive In Home Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County DD Program Managers | <input type="checkbox"/> Stabilization and Crisis Unit (SACU) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ODDS Children's Residential Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child Welfare Programs | |

Message: The Office of Licensing and Regulatory Oversight recently requested clarification of Oregon Fire Code, Appendix L, Adult Foster Homes from the Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office (OSFM). Provided below are the specific questions we asked the OSFM along with their formal response:

Appendix L, Section L 104.1, of the Oregon Fire Code (OFC) states: "Exits. All adult foster homes shall have approved exits, the use of which is within the capabilities of the persons the homes are to serve." The components of an exit are referred to as part of the means of egress and are elements such as, exterior exit doors, exterior stairways, interior exit stairways and ramps.

In addition, item #1 of this section states in part that, "Every sleeping room shall have at least one operable window or door approved for emergency escape or rescue." This section requires emergency escape and rescue provisions in residential buildings where occupants may be sleeping during a potential fire buildup, who are capable of self-preservation. It is important to note that this emergency egress window is only an element of emergency escape and rescue and does not comprise any part of the means of egress "exit requirements" unless it is a door conforming with the normal egress requirements.

So in essence, the primary means of egress “exit” from the building is provided via a door and within each sleeping room at least one emergency egress window or emergency door is provided for emergency escape and rescue. There are specific size requirements for these emergency windows as outlined in Section L 104.1 #1 OFC.

In regards to item #7 it reads, “Permanently attached ladders, rope or chain ladders, and other devices shall not be used as a substitute for an emergency escape or rescue.”

Q: Does this statement prohibit the use of emergency escape ladders, such as the collapsible type that may be stored inside the bedroom near the exit window, in all of the adult foster home’s bedrooms?

A: No. This statement does not prohibit the use of permanently attached ladders, collapsible rope or chain ladders, and other devices. They just cannot be a substitute for the correct placement and size of an emergency escape and rescue windows or doors. Such devices such as collapsible rope or chain ladders can be a very useful life-safety device.

Q: Are these devices (emergency escape ladders as stated above) allowed for non-resident bedrooms, assuming the individual can safely use the device for exiting purposes?

A: Yes, for emergency egress purposes. Section L104.1 #7 OFC is not intended to prohibit these devices. This section merely prohibits them as a substitute for an emergency escape or rescue window or door in the sleeping room. There is not a code requirement mandating these devices. When provided, they are intended to be used to assist the emergency egress from sleeping rooms through properly sized windows.

Q: If a non-ground floor level has a secondary exit, such as stairs or a ramp, does Appendix L allow that exit to be the approved secondary exit from other bedrooms on the same level?

A: No. But then it depends on the layout. When a second exit is required on a non-ground floor level, access to this exit cannot be through a bedroom. (See Section 1014.2 #3 OFC). A common code enforcement problem is a locked door in the egress path. Relying on an egress path through an adjacent bedroom to be available at all times is not a reasonable expectation.

In conclusion, I am not aware of a code requirement for foster homes to have fire escape ladders. Each home operator should weigh the pros and cons, along with the age and mobility of the occupants. The adults in the foster homes are to be capable of self-preservation. If provided, here’s a couple of key features to look for:

Standoffs. These are protrusions that hold the ladder rungs away from the side of the

building. Standoffs also help to steady the ladder and allow enough room for a secure toehold.

Length. Home escape ladders normally come in two standard lengths – 15 feet and 25 feet. The shorter length is adequate for most two story bedrooms, while the longer is used for three story buildings. Check the load limit. Ladders should be rated for at least 1,000 pounds.

Ease of deployment. They can be somewhat awkward to use, but with a little practice you will be fine. It should have a simple, tangle free release with easy to understand instructions. We recommend that you practice deploying it so as to be familiar with its operation. Practice climbing out a single story window though. Be aware of outside power lines and hard items located below the ladder deployment. Make sure the ladder will attach securely to the intended window sills too.

If you have any questions about this information, contact:

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