

Access to Openings & Roofs

2025 California Fire Code — Section 504

Purpose. These requirements help ensure firefighters can reach required exterior openings and roof areas during an emergency. The information below summarizes the primary requirements of CFC Section 504 and the related roof-access provisions it references.

1. Access to Exterior Openings

Required exterior doors and openings must remain available for emergency access. Exterior openings required by the California Fire Code or California Building Code must be maintained so the fire department has ready access. When required by the fire code official, an approved walkway must connect the fire apparatus access road to the required opening.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §504.1

2. Blocked or Nonfunctional Exterior Doors

A door that appears usable from the exterior but has been made nonfunctional must be clearly identified. The exterior side must be marked with the words “THIS DOOR BLOCKED.” The door and its function may not be eliminated without prior approval.

Requirement	Minimum / Required Condition
Sign wording	THIS DOOR BLOCKED
Letter height	6 inches minimum
Principal stroke width	3/4 inch minimum
Contrast	Lettering must contrast with the background

Code reference: 2025 CFC §504.2

3. Stairway Access to the Roof

New buildings that are four or more stories above grade plane must generally have a stairway to the roof. This requirement does not apply where the roof has a slope greater than 4 units vertical in 12 units horizontal (33.3%).

- The roof-access stairway must comply with the related stairway-to-roof provisions of CFC/CBC §1011.12.
- The stairway must be identified at street and floor levels with signage indicating that the stairway continues to the roof.
- Where a roof is vegetative, landscaped, occupied, or used for another purpose, stairways must be provided as required for the applicable occupancy classification.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §504.3; related CFC/CBC §1011.12

4. How Required Roof Access Is Provided

When a stairway is required to extend to the roof, the related building-code provisions control the access configuration. Key points include:

- Roofs and penthouses containing elevator equipment that requires maintenance access must be accessible by a stairway.
- Where a stairway is provided to a roof, access is generally made through a compliant penthouse.
- For a building without an occupiable roof, a qualifying roof hatch or trap door may be permitted. The opening must be at least 16 square feet, with no dimension less than 2 feet.
- Where a required roof-hatch opening is within 10 feet of a roof edge, guard requirements apply to the roof access or roof edge as required by the referenced provisions.

5. Roof Obstructions

Commercial roof areas must not be arranged so that obstructions make emergency access or egress hazardous. California provisions identify examples such as barbed-wire or razor-wire fencing, chain-link or other fencing material, cables, aerials, antennas, and similar obstructions.

Limited antenna-support exception. The California roof-access provision contains a limited exception for qualifying guy wires, rods, and aerial antenna masts on roofs with a slope of less than 30 degrees. Among the conditions, at least 7 feet of full clearance must be maintained between the roof and the obstruction, and supporting guy wires or rods are subject to limits based on mast height.

California reference incorporated with §504: Title 19, Division 1, §3.05(b)

6. Quick Compliance Check

- ☐ Required exterior openings are accessible and not blocked by storage, construction, landscaping, or other obstructions.
- ☐ Any nonfunctional exterior door that still appears usable is properly marked “THIS DOOR BLOCKED.”
- ☐ Required roof-access stairways are provided where applicable and are properly identified.
- ☐ Required roof hatches, penthouses, and guards comply with the referenced roof-access provisions.
- ☐ Roof-mounted fencing, cables, antennas, or similar features do not create hazardous emergency-access or egress conditions.

Applicable Code References

- 2025 California Fire Code, Title 24, Part 9 — §504, Access to Building Openings and Roofs
- 2025 California Fire Code / California Building Code — §1011.12, Stairway to Roof; related §§1011.13 and 1015 as applicable
- California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1 — §3.05(b), Fire Department Access and Egress (Roofs)

This handout summarizes commonly applicable requirements for public information. The adopted code, referenced standards, approved plans, and determinations of the fire code official govern where a conflict or project-specific condition exists.
