

Driveway Regulations

2025 California Fire Code — Section 503 | California Title 19 | Title 14 Fire Safe Regulations (where applicable)

Purpose. This handout summarizes fire-department access requirements that can apply to private driveways serving homes and other buildings. A driveway that functions as required fire apparatus access must be designed and maintained so emergency vehicles can reach the property safely. Separate California Fire Safe Regulations may also apply to qualifying projects in wildfire-prone areas.

1. When a Driveway Becomes Fire Apparatus Access

The California Fire Code does not create a separate statewide “residential driveway” chapter. When a driveway is the route used to provide required fire apparatus access to a building or facility, the applicable provisions of CFC Section 503 govern that access route.

Required fire apparatus access must generally extend to within 150 feet of all portions of the facility and all portions of the exterior walls of the first story, measured along an approved route. The fire code official may approve an increased distance under the exceptions listed in CFC §503.1.1.

California Title 19 also requires access roads from buildings to a public street to be all-weather, hard-surfaced, suitable for fire apparatus, and provided within a right-of-way not less than 20 feet wide, subject to the enforcing agency’s authority to waive or modify that requirement when permitted by the regulation.

Code references: 2025 CFC §§503.1.1–503.2; 19 CCR §3.05(a)

2. Base Fire Apparatus Access Requirements

Where the driveway is required to serve as a fire apparatus access road, the following base requirements apply unless an approved modification or other applicable code provision changes the requirement.

Requirement	Minimum / Required Condition
Unobstructed width	20 feet minimum, exclusive of shoulders
Vertical clearance	13 feet 6 inches minimum
Surface	Must support the imposed loads of fire apparatus and provide all-weather driving capability
Turning radius	Determined by the fire code official based on fire department apparatus
Dead-end access	More than 150 feet requires an approved fire-apparatus turnaround
Grade	Within limits established by the fire code official based on fire department apparatus
Approach / departure angles	Within limits established by the fire code official based on fire department apparatus
Bridges / elevated surfaces	AASHTO HB-17; must carry imposed fire-apparatus loads; load posting where required

Code references: 2025 CFC §§503.2.1–503.2.8

3. Driveway Gates and Emergency Access

Security gates across required fire apparatus access must be approved. The gate must have an approved means of emergency operation, and both the gate and emergency operation must remain operational at all times.

- Electric gate operators, when provided, must be listed in accordance with UL 325.

- Gates intended for automatic operation must be designed, constructed, and installed in accordance with ASTM F2200.
 - Base CFC §503.6 does not establish one universal statewide gate width or gate setback for every driveway; project-specific or locally adopted standards may add dimensions.
- Code reference: 2025 CFC §503.6*

4. Keep the Required Driveway Clear

Required fire apparatus access cannot be obstructed by parked vehicles or other objects. The minimum width and vertical clearance required for the access route must be maintained at all times.

- Keep vehicles, trailers, storage, construction materials, landscaping, tree limbs, and similar obstructions out of the required clear access envelope.
- Traffic-calming devices on required fire apparatus access roads are prohibited unless approved by the fire code official.

Code references: 2025 CFC §§503.4 and 503.4.1

5. Address Identification at Long or Private Driveways

Buildings must have approved address identification that is visible from the street or road fronting the property. Characters must contrast with the background, be at least 4 inches high, and have a minimum 1/2-inch stroke width.

Where access is by a private road and the building cannot be seen from the public way, a monument, pole, sign, or other approved means must identify the structure. Address identification must be maintained.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §505.1

6. California State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations — Where Applicable

California’s State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations in Title 14 contain additional driveway-specific requirements for developments within their scope. These provisions are separate from CFC §503 and Title 19 and should not be assumed to replace other applicable fire-access requirements.

For purposes of these Fire Safe Regulations, “Driveway” is a defined term for qualifying vehicular access serving limited residential development. Applicability should be determined before using the dimensions below.

References: 14 CCR §§1270.01 and 1273.00; 2025 California Wildland-Urban Interface Code §403 reprints these access provisions

Title 14 Item	Requirement
Traffic lane	Minimum one 10-foot traffic lane
Horizontal clearance	14 feet unobstructed
Vertical clearance	13 feet 6 inches unobstructed
Driveway grade	16% maximum; may exceed 16% up to 20% only with local approval and mitigation providing the same practical effect
Turnout location	Driveways over 150 ft and under 800 ft: turnout near midpoint; over 800 ft: turnouts no more than 400 ft apart
Turnout dimensions	12 ft wide × 30 ft long, with a 25-ft minimum taper on each end
Turnaround geometry	40-ft minimum turning radius; if a hammerhead/T is used, the top of the T is at least 60 ft long
Long-driveway turnaround	For driveways over 300 ft, a turnaround must be within 50 ft of the building
Road / driveway structures	Structures must be designed and maintained to support at least 40,000 lb; engineering specifications may be required

Code references: 14 CCR §§1273.01, 1273.02, 1273.03, 1273.05 and 1273.06

7. Gate Requirements Under Title 14 — Where Applicable

When the State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations apply, driveway gates have specific minimum clearances and placement requirements.

- Gate entrance must be at least 2 feet wider than the traffic lane(s) serving the gate.
- Gate opening must provide at least 14 feet of unobstructed horizontal clearance and 13 feet 6 inches of unobstructed vertical clearance.
- A gate providing access from a road to a driveway must be located at least 30 feet from the roadway and must open so a vehicle can stop without obstructing traffic on the road.
- Security gates require approval and an approved means of emergency operation that remains operational.

Code reference: 14 CCR §1273.09

8. Important Note About CFC Appendix D

Appendix D contains additional fire-apparatus-access specifications, including a 75,000-pound access-road load, a 26-foot width where a hydrant is located on the access road, a 10% grade criterion, and detailed dead-end turnaround dimensions. However, Appendix D is not adopted statewide by the State Fire Marshal. It becomes mandatory only where it has been specifically adopted or otherwise made applicable by the jurisdiction.

Reference: 2025 California Fire Code, Appendix D — Fire Apparatus Access Roads (not adopted statewide by SFM)

9. Quick Compliance Check

- ☐ Determine whether the driveway is required to function as a fire apparatus access road.
- ☐ Required access reaches the building within the applicable CFC §503.1.1 distance.
- ☐ Required width and 13 ft 6 in vertical clearance are continuously maintained.
- ☐ Surface and any bridge, culvert, or elevated structure can support the required emergency-vehicle loads.
- ☐ Turning radius, grade, and approach/departure transitions are approved for fire apparatus.
- ☐ Any dead-end access longer than 150 ft has an approved turnaround where required.
- ☐ Gates are approved and provide reliable emergency operation.
- ☐ The property address is visible from the roadway or is identified at the private-road/driveway entrance when necessary.
- ☐ The driveway is free of parked vehicles, storage, landscaping, and other obstructions.
- ☐ Applicability of the Title 14 State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations and any locally adopted amendments has been checked.

Applicable Code References

- 2025 California Fire Code, Title 24, Part 9 — §§503.1–503.6, Fire Apparatus Access Roads
- 2025 California Fire Code, Title 24, Part 9 — §505.1, Address Identification
- California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1 — §3.05(a), Fire Department Access and Egress
- California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 1.5 — §§1270.01 and 1273.00–1273.09, State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations (where applicable)
- 2025 California Wildland-Urban Interface Code — §403, Access (incorporating/reprinting applicable Title 14 access provisions)
- 2025 California Fire Code, Appendix D — supplemental fire apparatus access criteria when adopted or otherwise made applicable

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