

**BC BUILDING CODE INTERPRETATION COMMITTEE**  
**AIBC, APEGBC, BOABC, POABC**

**File No: 98-0146**

**INTERPRETATION**

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Interpretation Date: January 17, 2006

Building Code Edition: BC Building Code 1998

Subject: Handrails at exterior landscape stairs serving a single dwelling unit

Keywords: handrails, landscape stairs, single dwelling unit

Building Code Reference(s): 2.1.3.1.(1), 9.8.7.1.(3), 9.8.1.1.(1), 9.9.1.1.(1)

**Question:**

An exterior landscape stair is located in the sideyard of a lot that contains a single dwelling unit. The stairs are on grade and contain more than 3 risers. Is it necessary to install handrails on these stairs?

**Interpretation:**

In certain circumstances

Sentence 2.1.3.1.(1) identifies the scope of the application of Part 9 of the BC Building Code to "buildings". This implies that landscaped areas are beyond the scope of the BC Building Code.

Sentence 9.8.1.1.(1) states that Section 9.8 applies to both interior and exterior stairs.

Sentence 9.8.7.1.(3) requires at least one handrail on exterior stairs that contain more than 3 risers when such stairs "serve" not more than one dwelling unit.

Sentence 9.9.1.1.(1) requires that stairways, handrails and guards in a "means of egress" shall conform to the requirements of Section 9.8 as well as Section 9.9.

The term "serve" in the context of Sentence 9.8.7.1.(3) is interpreted to mean "located within a "means of egress" from a single dwelling unit to an approved open space".

Yes - If the stair is the only "means of egress" from the dwelling unit to an approved open space, then it would require at least one handrail.

No - If the stair is not required as a "means of egress" from the dwelling unit to an approved open space, then it does not require any handrails.

It should be noted that the BC Building Code provides a minimum level of safety. In this day of aging population, all stairs represent a hazard to elderly persons and the installation of handrails is considered good practice, although not mandatory in all cases.

  
R. J. Light, Committee Chair