

SUBJECT: Required Guard Locations

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 25, 2010

INTERPRETATION NUMBER: ADM – 1.1012.1

SEE ALSO: 2006 IBC – Section 1012.1

INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Guards are required to be located along the open sides of walking surfaces, mezzanines, industrial equipment platforms, stairways, ramps and landings which are located more than 30 inches above the floor or grade below. One of the questions that is frequently asked is how far the lower elevation must extend away from the open edge of the walking surface of the stair, landing or floor to satisfy the 30” or less requirement before the guard is required. Does the requirement allow the grade to slope immediately away from the walking surface as long it is 30” or less immediately adjacent to the open walking surface and/or can the lower surface be terraced away from the open edge, and if so, how wide must the terrace be.

IBC section 502.1 defines “grade plane” as a reference plane representing the average of finished ground level adjoining a building’s exterior walls. This reference plane is established by including establishing the lowest points between the building and a point 6 feet away from the building. We believe that this dimension is reasonable to apply to this application. If someone falls from a walking surface, it is more than likely that they will fall outward instead of straight down. Thus is it reasonable to assume that the intent of the code is to provide a safe fall zone in which a taller person could land. It is therefore our interpretation that the grade adjacent to the open sides of walking surfaces must be substantially level to a point at least 6’ away from the open side of the adjacent walking surface and not more than 30” below the walking surface to avoid the guardrail requirement. This width would apply to stepped or terraced surfaces as well.

It is also our interpretation that guardrails on stairs and ramps may be permitted to terminate at a point where the stair or ramp walking surface is no longer more than 30” above the lower grade or floor elevation, and is not required to be continuous to the bottom of the stair or ramp.