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Guide Lines for Handrails and Guards

Handrails and guards are two different components.

- A **handrail** is a horizontal or sloping rail intended for grasping by the hand for guidance or support.
- A **guardrail** is a building component located at the open sides of elevated walking surfaces and stairs that minimizes the possibility of a fall from the walking surface to the level below.

Handrails:

1. Handrails shall be continuous on at least one side of each continuous run stairs with 4 or more risers.
2. Top of handrails shall be placed no less than 34 inches or more than 38 inches above the stair nosing.
3. Handrails must be continuous the entire length of the stairs, from a point directly above the top riser to a point directly above the lowest riser, and return to a wall or post.
4. Handrails shall be placed at least 1-1/2 inches from any wall or other obstruction and cannot project more than 4-1/2 inches over the stairs.
5. The handgrip area shall not be less than 1-1/4 inches or more than 2-3/4 inches in width.
 - a. **Type I:** Handrails with a circular cross section shall have an outside diameter of at least 1-1/4 inches and not greater than 2 inches. If the handrail is not circular it shall have a perimeter dimension of at least 4 inches and not greater than 6-1/4 inches with a maximum cross section dimension of 2-1/4 inches.
 - b. **Type II:** Handrails with a perimeter greater than 6-1/4 inches shall provide a graspable finger recess area on both sides of the rail. The finger recess shall begin within a distance of 3/4 inch measured vertically from the tallest portion of the profile and achieve a depth of at least 5/16 inch within 7/8 inch below the widest portion of the profile. This required depth shall continue for at least 3/8 inch to a level that is not less than 1-3/4 inches below the tallest portion of the profile. The minimum width of the handrail above the recess shall be 1-1/4 inches to a maximum of 2-3/4 inches. Edges shall have a minimum radius of 0.01 inch.

Guards:

1. Decks, porches, balconies, ramps or raised floor surfaces located 30 inches or more above the floor or grade below shall have guards not less than 36 inches in height. See pages 2 and 7.
2. Porches and decks which are enclosed with insect screening shall be equipped with guards where the walking surface is located more than 30 inches above the floor or grade below.
3. Open sides of stairs with a total rise of more than 30 inches above the floor or grade below shall have guards not less than 34 inches in height measured vertically from the nosing of the treads.
4. The requirement for guards along open sides of stairs not only applies to the portion of a stairway that is more than 30 inches above the adjacent floor, but it also applies to any portion of a flight of stairs less than 30 inches above the floor.
5. All guards shall have intermediate rails or ornamental closures that prohibit the passage of a sphere 4 inches or more in diameter. The triangular openings formed by the riser, tread and bottom rail of a guard at the open side of a stairway are permitted to be of such a size that a 6-inch sphere cannot pass through. See pages 2 and 7.
6. When designed properly, the top rail of a guard can also serve as the required handrail. See page 6.