



City of Santa Barbara  
Building & Safety Division  
**Residential Handrail  
& Guard Requirements**

Community Development  
630 Garden Street  
805-564-5485

The following requirements are for handrails and guards in residential occupancies that serve only one dwelling unit. Some of these requirements do not apply to multi-family and commercial occupancies.

**Handrails: §R311.7.8, 2022 CRC**

Residential stairways with 4 or more risers are required to have a continuous handrail the full length of the stairs. The top of handrails shall not be placed less than 34 inches nor more than 38 inches above the nosing of the treads. Handrails shall be continuous except at landings where a newel post may interrupt; or at the lowest tread a volute, turnout or starting easing is permissible. Ends shall be returned or shall terminate in newel posts or safety terminals. The handgrip portion of handrails shall not be less than 1 ¼ inches nor more than 2 inches in cross-sectional dimension or the shape shall provide an equivalent gripping surface. If the handrail is not circular, it shall have a perimeter dimension of at least 4 inches and not greater than 6 ¼ inches with a maximum cross section dimension of 2 ¼ inches. Handrail edges shall have a minimum radius of .01 inches. Handrails projecting from a wall shall have a space of not less than 1 ½ inches between the wall and handrail. Each handrail shall not project into the required stairway more than 4 ½ inches on either side of the stairway and the minimum clear width of the stairway at and below the handrail height shall not be less than 31 ½" where the handrail is installed on one side and 27 inches where the handrails are provided on both sides. The mounting of handrails shall be such that the completed handrail and supporting structure are capable of withstanding a load of at least 200 pounds applied in any direction at any point on the rail.

**Guards: §R312, 2022 CRC**

Guards shall be located along open-sided walking surfaces, including stairs, ramps, and landings, that are located more than 30 inches measured vertically to the floor or grade below at any point within 36 inches horizontally to the edge of the open side. The top of guardrails shall not be less than 42 inches in height. Guards whose top rail serves as a stair handrail, shall have a height not less than 34 inches and not more than 38 inches. On interior R-2 or R-3 stairways, open guardrails shall have intermediate rails or an ornamental pattern such that a sphere 4 inches in diameter cannot pass through. The triangular openings formed by the riser, tread and bottom element of the guardrail at the open side of a stairway may be of such size that a sphere of 6 inches in diameter cannot pass through. The top rail of the guardrail must be able to withstand a load per lineal foot of 50 pounds applied horizontally at a right angle. Intermediate rails, panel fillers and their connections shall be capable of withstanding a load of 50 pounds per square foot applied horizontally at right angles over the entire tributary area, including openings and spaces between rails.

**Window Opening Height: §R312.2.1, 2022 CRC**

In dwelling units, where the bottom of the clear opening of an operable window opening is located less than 24 inches (610 mm) above the finished floor and greater than 72 inches (1829 mm) above the finished grade or other surface below on the exterior of the building, the operable window shall comply with one of the following:

1. Operable window openings will not allow a 4-inch diameter (102 mm) sphere to pass through where the openings are in their largest opened position.
2. Operable windows are provided with window opening control devices or fall prevention devices that comply with ASTM F2090.