INTRODUCTION

This Public Advice Note explains the basic requirements for external fire escapes and gives guidance on how to ensure that they remain in a safe and useable condition.

PROTECTION OF EXTERNAL FIRE ESCAPES FROM FIRE

It will be necessary to ensure that the use of an external escape stairway cannot be prejudiced by smoke and flames issuing from openings (such as windows and doors) in the external wall of the building.

Any door opening onto the stairway below the top floor and any door in the external wall beneath the stairway should be self closing and should have a minimum half hour standard of fire resistance. If windows are below or less than 1.8 metres horizontally from the stairway, they should be fixed shut and have the above standard of fire resistance.

The route from the foot of the stairway to a final place of safety should be unobstructed and free from vegetation.

There may be a requirement to provide both primary and emergency lighting for the whole of the escape route and a suitable stairway enclosure to afford protection from the weather.

SPIRAL OR HELICAL STAIRWAYS

Spiral or helical stairways are usually acceptable only in exceptional cases and should not be used by more than 50 persons who are not members of the public. Where they form part of the means of escape provided they should be designed in accordance with the relevant British Standard and, if they are intended to serve members of the public, should be a type E (public) stair, in accordance with that standard.

If there is any doubt as to whether a spiral or helical stairway meets this standard, advice should be sought from your local fire safety district office or building control office (address given in Further Advice).

INSPECTIONS

External fire escapes, (and all other means of escape in case of fire with which a building is provided), must be available for use at all times when the premises is occupied.

It is therefore recommended that a daily inspection should be carried out to check the following points.

- That the doors giving access to the escape are easily open-able and open fully
- That any self closing doors which are in the vicinity of the escape are effectively self-closing
- That any fire resisting glazing adjacent to the escape is intact and fixed shut
- That the stairway, landing and route to a final place of safety (such as a roadway or car park) are unobstructed by goods, rubbish or vegetation
- That nothing is stored beneath the stairway
- That the stair treads, handrails and brackets securing the stairway to the building are in a sound condition. If there is evidence of rust on a metal stairway, it is likely that it needs a thorough inspection by a structural engineer followed by any necessary repairs and thorough treatment with weatherproof paint

- That the stair treads are non-slippery, e.g.no moss or algae growth
- That primary and escape lighting is in working order
- That any necessary signs are in place and are unobstructed

Immediate action should be taken to remedy any faults found during the daily check.

It is wise to scrape and re-paint a metal fire escape at regular intervals to ensure that it remains in a safe condition and to avoid the need for major and expensive structural repairs, which may put large areas of the building out of use.

Timber stairs should be carefully examined for signs of rot.

OTHER AUTHORITIES YOU MAY NEED TO CONSULT

The construction, alteration or re-construction of an external fire escape constitutes building work and an application should be made to the local Building Control Office.