



## BUILDING AND SAFETY

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### CITY OF BERKELEY

#### **SUBJECT: CONSTRUCTION OF EXTERIOR DECKS, BALCONIES AND STAIRS IN FIRE ZONES 2 AND 3**

#### **CODE REFERENCE: CBC/BMC SECTION 704A.4.2.1 UNDERSIDE OF APPENDAGES AND FLOOR PROJECTIONS**

This guideline is intended to enhance consistency in application and enforcement of Chapter 7A Materials and Construction Methods for Exterior Wildfire Exposure

On April 1, 2009 the City of Berkeley Building Official and building division plans examiners met with the City of Berkeley Fire Marshal, Deputy Fire Marshal and Fire Department plans examiner to discuss interpretations of the Building Standards and Materials for Chapter 7A, of the 2007 California Building Code, also known as the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Codes.

Discussion in particular involved the application of the above standards to deck construction in the City of Berkeley Fire Zones 2 and 3. A question had been raised on whether the WUI standards applied only to decking surfaces of decks, or whether the standards also included the underfloor construction of decks, (i.e. deck framing and supports)

Section 704A.4.2.1 *Underside of Appendages and Floor Projections* reads as follows: "The underside of cantilevered and overhanging appendages and floor projections shall maintain the ignition resistant integrity of exterior walls, or the projection shall be enclosed to the grade."

The 2007 California Building Code Section 1602.1 *Definitions* defines *Exterior Balcony* as "An exterior floor projecting from and supported by a structure without additional independent supports". *Deck* is defined as "An exterior floor supported on at least two opposing sides by an adjacent structure, and/or posts, piers or other independent supports".

Section 704.2 *Projections* states: "Cornices, eave overhangs, exterior balconies and similar projections extending beyond the floor area shall conform to the requirements of this section and Section 1406", thus clearly including exterior balconies and similar projections such as decks and stairs into the projection category.

A Wildland Urban Interface training workshop CD was also reviewed, as well as printed materials from the State Fire Marshal's website, which imply that the underside of decks, balconies and stairs is to be protected.

As Chapter 7A does not provide any specific definitions within that chapter otherwise defining *appendages* and *floor projections*, the local authority must rely on definitions already provided in the California Building Code.

It is therefore the City of Berkeley's position that unenclosed exterior deck/balcony/stair framing members must comply with the WUI standards and be constructed of either ignition-resistant, fire-retardant-treated, non-combustible or heavy timber construction. Underfloor framing members include joists, ledgers, posts, beams, and stringers. Treads and risers are considered decking and must comply with the provisions of Section 704A.4.1.1 *Decking Surfaces*.

Please note that the above interpretation is based on the local amendments to and adoption of CBC Chapter 7A and may differ from the requirements of other jurisdictions.