

Summer safety tips from the City of Rehoboth Beach Building & Licensing Department

As summer approaches, the City of Rehoboth Beach Building & Licensing Department is urging homeowners and renters to take the time to check indoor and outdoor areas for potential safety hazards. Proper inspections now can help to keep your family and friends safe in the future. The codes adopted by the Mayor and Commissioners are safety measures to protect you and your guests from accidents and during emergency situations.

Porches, Decks and Balconies

Porches can be at risk of collapsing if they are not properly constructed or if they are old. The City of Rehoboth Beach has building codes in place that homeowners must follow when building or repairing porches. A common safety hazard occurs when porches are nailed to buildings rather than being attached with the proper anchors or bolts. Nails are a poor method for attaching porches to buildings because they work their way loose over time. Other safety hazards to look for are:

- Split or rotting wood
- Wobbly handrails or guardrails
- Loose, missing or rusting anchors, nails or screws
- Missing, damaged or loose support beams and planking
- Excessive movement of the porch when walked on
- Swaying or unstable porches

Swimming Pools

Because they can be dangerous to young children, all pools must be surrounded by a fence or other barrier. Small, inflatable pools must also be protected. The 2006 International Building Code says that any pool with more than 24 inches of water has to have a four-foot fence or other barrier around it. Any gates in the fence must be self-closing and self-latching. Other things to consider when installing a pool:

- Building permit requirements
- Zoning requirements
- Electrical clearances and utility easements

Interior

This is also a good time to check the interior of your home for potential safety issues. Many times we place items in hallways or near exits without a thought to what happens if there is a medical emergency and a gurney needs to get down the hall or there is a fire and we can't get out the door. Some things to consider:

Identify Common Fire Hazards

- Check the areas for visible electrical problems on equipment, outlets, wires, etc.
- Properly identify flammable liquids and combustible materials.

Housekeeping

- Do not accumulate combustible materials
- Maintain 36” clearance in front of the electrical panel.
- Have smoke detectors in each bedroom, in the hall outside of each bedroom area and on every floor. Test them monthly and replace batteries as needed.

Egress or Exiting Buildings

- The means of egress from each part of the structure, including exits, stairways, egress doors, emergency lights, and any panic hardware must be maintained in a safe condition and free of all obstructions.
- Items located in stairwells or that block exit doors, restrict corridors, or block access to fire emergency equipment constitute serious fire and life safety hazards. Stairwells and corridors are intended to provide a safe and adequate means for occupants to exit the building and emergency personnel to access the building.
- Tables, holiday decorations (Christmas trees), bicycles, vending machines, and any other movable equipment cannot obstruct aisles, passageways or stairways.
- Any storage in stairwells or hallways is prohibited at all times. This is to ensure safe egress for occupants in the event of an emergency.
- In each room where chairs and/or tables are utilized, the arrangement needs to provide for ready egress by aisles to each egress door. The minimum required width is 44” where serving an occupant load greater than 50 and 36” where serving 50 or less.
- Building occupants should think of an emergency scenario that would require them to evacuate and determine a primary and an alternative means of egress.

Exterior

- Post your address. Numbers need to be 4” minimum and clearly visible and legible from the street fronting the property. If the emergency workers can’t find you, they can’t help you.
- Make sure all of the exits remain clear and passable.

Taking some time now to make sure your home is safe will make a more enjoyable summer for everyone.