

You Can't Do That in New York

When the city building codes start to change on July 1, you may be surprised at what you (will no longer) see.

By [S.Jhoanna Robledo](#) Published Jun 15, 2008

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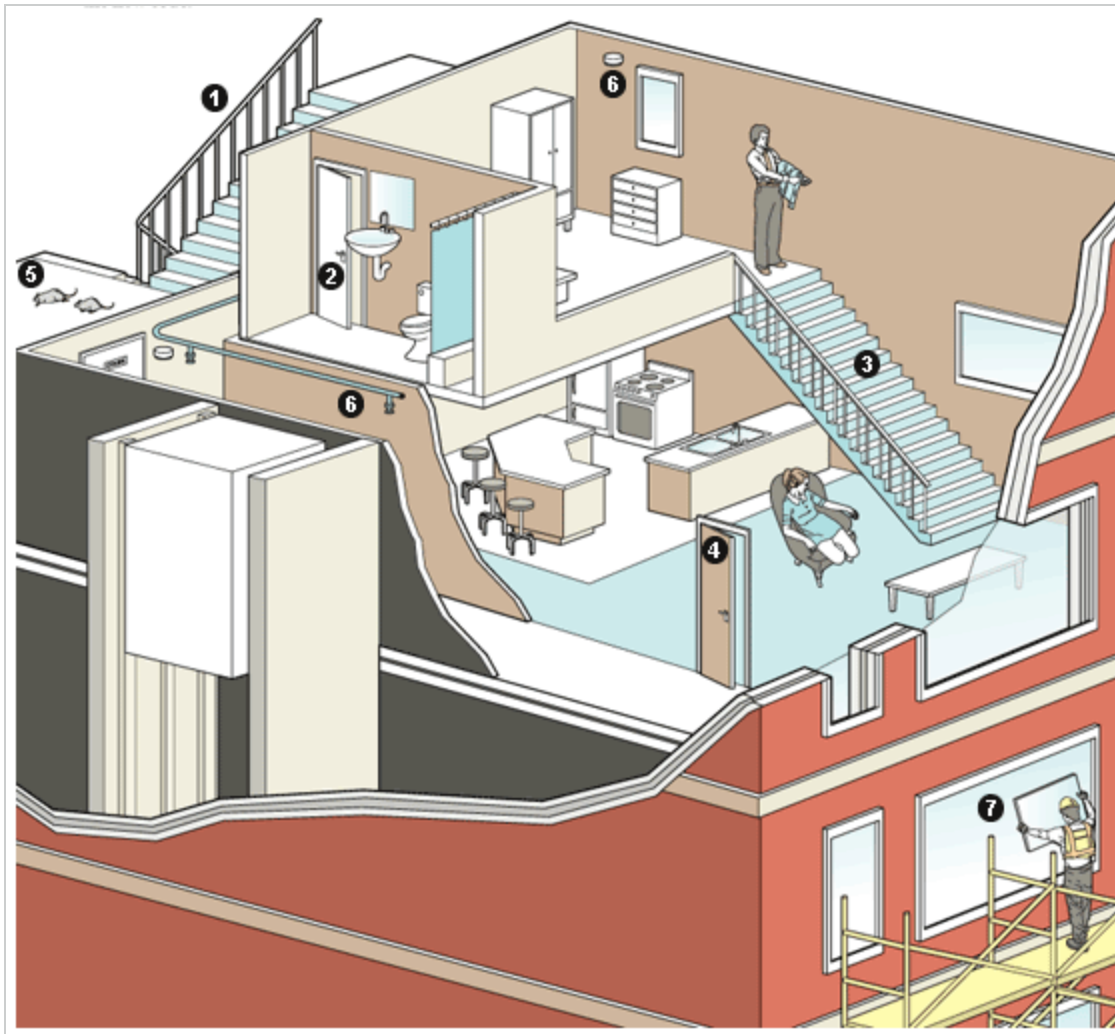


Illustration by Kagan McLeod

1. NO MORE SCISSOR STAIRS

What's New: In many buildings, the two required sets of fire stairs are intertwined to save floor space. That's over, in buildings of more than twelve stories. New stairwells will have to be wider, too—up to 44 inches from 36—and sheathed in impact-resistant Sheetrock.

The Effect: The new rules (a legacy of 9/11) will take a “significant” bite out of square footage, says Brian Ahern of the Gotham Organization, a development firm. We may see fewer sliver buildings because of the smaller salable square footage on each floor, adds Michael Zenreich, an architect who helped write

the new code.

2. GREEN RULES

What's New: Financial incentives for recycling construction waste; water- and energy-conservation requirements, and more.

The Effect: The new regulations codify a trend that's already developed, particularly when it comes to energy-efficient roofs. The new laws give developers who build ecofriendly homes and offices extra fee rebates, on a sliding scale based on how much water and power their buildings will save.

3. NO MORE AIRY STAIRS

What's New: Indoor staircase risers—that is, the upright back on each step—may have no more than four inches of their height open, and handrails must have vertical uprights.

The Effect: Designers are going to hate this one. Open risers and horizontal-cable banisters are pretty much de rigueur in chic stores and modern duplexes. That floaty glass staircase in the Soho Apple store? You won't see another one like it.

4. LOFTS NEED REAL FRONT DOORS

What's New: In buildings over 75 feet tall, no more direct keyed entry to lofts and offices from elevators.

The Effect: One of the coveted touches of the luxury loft—your key operates the elevator, which opens directly into your apartment—will go away. The wording's a little vague, so the ruling may be open to interpretation, but Zenreich reads it to mean that elevators must now open into a vestibule, an arrangement that's deemed safer in a fire.

5. RATPROOFING

What's New: Thicker floors; kick-plates for wooden doors (they're harder to chew through); fewer gaps; and, when gaps like ventilation shafts are necessary, wire coverings or solid sheet-metal collars.

The Effect: According to the *New York Times*, 28.7 percent of rental units and 7.6 percent of owner-occupied housing reported rat infestations in 2005. Yikes.

6. SPRINKLERS AND SMOKE DETECTORS

What's New: No more individual smoke detectors in bedrooms and hallways of newly constructed apartments—they'll have to be wired together. Sprinkler systems will be required in residential buildings of three units or more, in attached two-family homes, and even in single-family homes of over three stories.

The Effect: Safety, but at a price. A homeowner with a brand-new 3,000-square-foot townhouse will pay an additional \$8,000 for the sprinklers alone, says Zenreich.

7. SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER YOU

What's New: Every construction site of a building ten stories or taller will have to have safety managers or coordinators on site. Crane operations will likewise require safety specialists. Sidewalk sheds with scaffolding overhead now need to be designed by an actual engineer— which, incredibly, was not required till now.

The Effect: Slightly less fear—maybe—as one walks the streets.



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