



Guidelines For Property Maintenance In The City of Richmond

**Department of Community Development
Permits and Inspections**

Guidelines For Property Maintenance In The City of Richmond

The Code of the City of Richmond, Section 14 -1, adopts Part III of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) as Richmond's Property Maintenance Code. This portion of the USBC known as The Virginia Maintenance Code provides administrative guidelines for the enforcement of maintenance standards set forth in the International Property Maintenance Code. Standards contained in the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code and City Ordinances are applied to all structures and properties, regardless of use, occupancy, or location within the City. City Ordinances are in place that allow for enforcement of accumulation of weeds in excess of 12 inches, accumulation of refuse and improperly stored inoperable vehicles.

The Department of Community Development, Permits and Inspections, Property Maintenance Division, is responsible for enforcing these standards in the City of Richmond. Any city employee may enforce certain ordinances and city agencies may overlap enforcement authority under different codes allowing for multiple charges to be filed for a single violation.

Most of the ordinances and standards are common sense rules, and a thorough look at a building and its surrounding property will usually indicate where repairs or maintenance is needed. The information contained herein addresses many areas that inspectors will observe when conducting an inspection. These guidelines address the basics and are meant to be informative in helping the owner or occupant insure that a property is in compliance. They are by no means all inclusive of the entire code.

Older structures may have been built before building codes were enacted. These structures are not exempt from the Property Maintenance Code. All structures must meet the requirements of the code under which it was built or altered. Enforcement of the Property Maintenance Code may cause improvements or upgrades to some structures. Generally, this would only happen if an inspection results in finding life safety concerns. However, some structures will have conditions that by design or through lack of maintenance are considered unsafe and will have to be modified to be safe. Some of these conditions are identified in this guide such as smoke detectors missing or not working, electrical service that is faulty or undersized and in some cases, changes to means of egress.

Inspections are conducted to protect the inhabitants of the structure, and the public, by insuring code compliance. Occasionally, a structure may be condemned for unsafe or unfit conditions. These conditions include lack of required utilities, an open vacant structure, alterations or conditions that affect the structural integrity of the building or improper use or occupancy creating an unsafe condition. All occupied structures must have proper electric utility, hot and cold running water, proper toilet facilities, and heat during certain months. Failure to meet these requirements could cause condemnation as unsafe or unfit for human habitation. Other conditions that could cause condemnation are improper fire separation, suppression or signaling systems. In such serious cases, either the conditions must be corrected or the occupants must vacate for their own safety. Depending on the circumstances and seriousness, the occupants may be allowed to stay for a short period of time, ranging from a few hours to a few days, temporary safeguards may be put in place or the Code Official may order immediate termination of occupancy.

The Staff of the City of Richmond's Code Enforcement Division will gladly answer any questions you may have. They may be contacted at:

City of Richmond
Department of Community Development
Property Maintenance Division
900 E. Broad Street, Rm. G-12 Richmond, VA 23219
804-646-6419

Exterior Features

Exterior property areas should be kept in a clean, safe and sanitary condition. Some of the most frequent exterior problems are improper garbage and rubbish storage, overgrowth of grass and tall weeds, and the improper storage of inoperable motor vehicles.

Grass and weeds must be maintained below twelve inches, bushes, shrubs, hedges and the like shall not project into the street, alley or sidewalk. Each owner is responsible for his or her property to the center of any ally that adjoins it.

Improper storage and accumulation of garbage and rubbish attracts rodents, animals and vermin, produces noxious odors and creates potential health hazards. Garbage stored outside should be placed in approved, leak proof, covered containers. Accumulation of rubbish such as ashes, paper, rags, cartons, boxes, wood, tree branches yard trimmings, tin cans, metals, discarded appliances, and inoperable mechanical equipment are required to be disposed of properly.

Abandoned, inoperable vehicles are unsightly, clutter the neighborhood, provide harborage for rodents and are an attractive nuisance for children. These vehicles are required to be stored in a completely enclosed building or screened or shielded from view. An inoperable vehicle is one that displays neither a valid inspection nor a valid license plate or which has had parts removed or is in such condition that prohibits its operation.

Vacant structures are often ignored and are deemed a fire hazard and unsafe when unsecured or open. Vacant structures are to be secured from public entry and the entry of the elements at all openings and maintained in a clean, safe and sanitary condition with no exterior violations. The fact that a structure is vacant does not exempt it from proper maintenance of the exterior.

Standing water next to a structure can cause damage to its foundation, wooden members and creates breeding areas for nuisance insects, especially mosquitoes. Yards should be graded to drain water away from the building foundations or slabs and to prevent the accumulation of stagnant water.

Walkways and driveways should be kept in a proper state of repair and be kept free of trip hazards, thus reducing the potential for injuries.

Accessory structures such as detached garages, utility sheds, fences, and outside walls should be maintained structurally sound and in good repair as you would the primary structure.

Swimming pools must be maintained to prevent creating mosquito harborage. All required gates, fences, closing and locking hardware must be maintained to prevent unauthorized entry and accidental drowning.

Buildings shall have assigned address numbers posted in a position plainly legible and visible from the street or road fronting the property. These numbers shall contrast with their background, be Arabic numerals or alphabet letters, and shall be 4 inches high with a minimum stroke width of ½ inch.

Foundation walls should be plumb and free from open cracks and breaks. Small cracks (settling cracks) are common on old houses and are usually acceptable. Large cracks, missing bricks and deteriorated mortar must be sealed or repaired. Foundations that do not properly support the building may cause the entire structure to be condemned.

Exterior walls and trim should be free from holes, breaks, loose and rotting materials, maintained weatherproof and properly surface coated to prevent deterioration. Siding, brick veneer and other wall finishes should have no openings that allow rain or moisture penetration

Roofs, flashing and gutters should all be maintained in good repair. Roofs must be sound, tight and have no defects that admit rain to the interior. Leaks can cause walls or ceilings to collapse, resulting in the unit being declared "Unsafe for Habitation". They can also create other problems that seriously affect the structure and required appliances and devices located therein. If installed, gutters must function properly and have all parts intact. Water must drain in a manner to not cause a nuisance or damage.

Chimneys should be maintained structurally sound and in good repair. Deterioration may prevent their proper operation and obstructed chimneys may cause carbon monoxide poisoning. Older chimneys frequently have loose bricks, or mortar that could fall off inside the chimney. Deterioration could cause the whole chimney to collapse.

Porches, stairs and decks should be maintained and structurally sound, in good repair, with proper anchorage and capable of supporting imposed loads. Handrails and guards should be firmly attached and capable of supporting imposed loads.

Exterior doors and hardware should be maintained in good condition. Doors should close tightly and hardware should latch securely, lock and unlock from the inside easily. Egress doors that use a key or other special device on the inside for locking and unlocking are prohibited.

Windows should be kept in sound condition; good repair and not admit rain or wind. Every openable window should be operable and capable of being held open by window hardware. Cracked glass is not a violation, but holes, sharp edges and areas that admit wind or rain are. Storm windows are not required but if installed must be maintained.

Insect screens are required between April 1 and December 1 on every window or door that is required for ventilation in habitable spaces. The screens should be no less than 16 mesh per inch to keep out insects. Screen doors must be self-closing.

Interior Features

Interior surfaces (walls, ceilings, floors, windows and doors) should be in good, clean and sanitary condition. Peeling, chipping, flaking paint should be repaired, removed or covered. Cracked or loose plaster or other defective conditions should be repaired. Interior surfaces that contain lead based paint can cause serious health hazards to children.

Structural Members shall be maintained in good repair and capable of supporting the imposed loads that they were designed to support.

Stairs and handrails should be sound, in good repair and capable of supporting normally imposed loads.

Common areas such as public hallways and stairs in structure other than one and two family dwellings must be illuminated at all times.

Minimum dimensions of habitable spaces should be no less than 7 feet in any dimension. Clearances of less than these standards may be acceptable if they cannot be increased easily and safety and comfort of living conditions are not significantly compromised.

Sleeping Rooms must have a minimum dimension of 70 square feet. Sleeping room load is calculated by at least 70 square feet for one occupant or 50 square feet for each occupant, if more than one. Bedrooms should be arranged so that occupants do not have to pass through a bedroom to get to another bedroom, bathroom, or living space.

Overcrowding can create serious health and sanitation problems. The Residential occupant load is based on sleeping room load and living/dining/kitchen load. The square footage of bedrooms limits the number of occupants allowed in a residential unit. This is a general guideline to occupant load and other regulations may apply.

Minimum Area Requirements			
Space Required	Minimum Area in Square Feet		
	1-2 occupants	3-5 occupants	6 or more
Living room	No requirements	120	150
Dining room	No requirements	80	100
Kitchen	50	50	60
Bedrooms	70 sq/ft for single occupancy or 50 sq/ft per person multiple occupants *		

* Other requirements may also apply

Required emergency escape openings must be operational from the interior without special keys, tools or knowledge

Smoke detectors are required in all rental dwellings. They must be operable and properly installed. They are required on every floor level, including basements, and in the immediate area of the bedrooms. Required interconnected detectors must operate as designed.

Fire resistive ratings must be maintained in all rated walls, floors, doors, stops and shafts. All fire suppression and early warning systems installed must be maintained at all times regardless of building occupancy, unless approved by the Code Official and Fire Marshal.

Plumbing and sewer systems must operate as designed with all bathtubs or showers, sinks and toilets supplied with hot and cold water of enough volume and pressure for the fixture to operate properly. All fixtures must be securely anchored and have adequate clearance. Drains should drain freely and not leak water or sewer gases. Water heaters should have a combination temperature / pressure relief valve with proper discharge piping. They should supply adequate hot water of at least 120 degrees F to every required faucet. Fuel fired water heaters must be installed properly including the fuel supply line and exhaust vent, and should not be located in any bathroom, bedroom or any other occupied room that is normally closed. Proper backflow prevention must be maintained at all fixtures.

Electrical systems must be installed and maintained in a safe and appropriate manner. A minimum electrical service of at least 60 amperes, three wires must serve each dwelling. The size of all wires must be adequate to carry all loads imposed and insulation on all wires must be intact. Every habitable room requires two separate and remote receptacles. Bathrooms require one receptacle and in certain conditions bathroom receptacles must be ground fault protected. Laundry areas require one grounded receptacle. Circuits shall not be overloaded and all safety devices must be in place. The excessive use of extension cords in place of permanent wiring is prohibited.

Heating is required during the period of October 15 through May 1st and must be capable of maintaining a temperature of not less than 65 degrees F in all habitable locations. All ducts, vents, chimneys shall be properly installed, maintained and free from leaks. All safety devices must operate as designed and all clearances must be maintained to manufacturers specifications.

If you wish to obtain your own copy of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code and its adopted standards, it can be found online at: www.vbcoa.org

For a complete understanding of the Property Maintenance Code, you will need a copy of the International Property Maintenance Code that is available through the International Code Council. They may be contacted for printed copies at: www.iccsafe.org

The City of Richmond codes and ordinances can be found online at www.municode.com