

SAFETY TIPS

From Your Building Inspector Ben Herrera



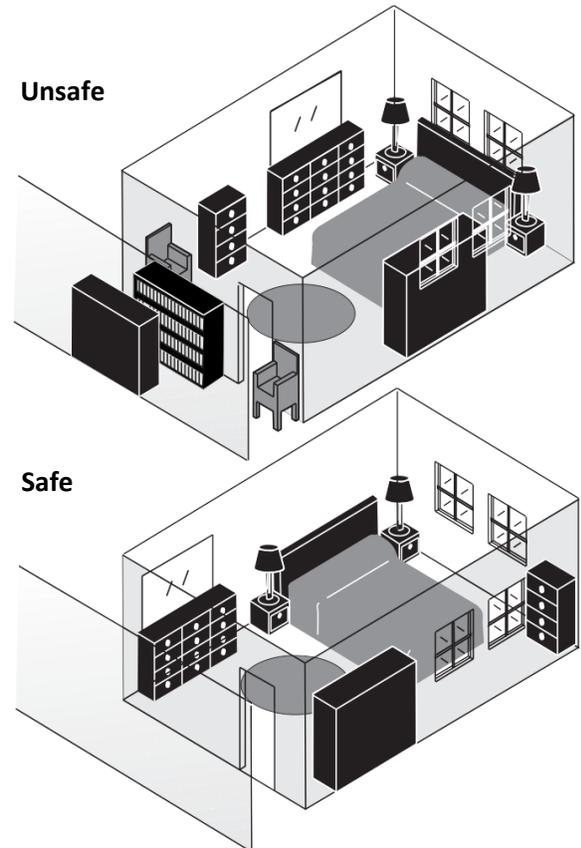
The City of Boca Raton Building Division is participating in Building Safety Month in conjunction with the International Code Council. We want to create awareness of the benefits of providing and maintaining a safe environment for residential and commercial buildings. Safety concerns should be addressed at all times. Although most importantly before, during, and after storm events.

Hurricanes bring many hazards to our coast and inland areas, including storm surge, flooding, tornadoes, and strong wind. The first step in the preparation for a storm is to determine your risk. Then you should develop an evacuation plan, if you live in a hurricane evacuation zone. Plan where you will go and how you would get there. Always keep your pets in mind and leave immediately if an evacuation order has been issued.

Purchase your disaster supplies before hurricane season begins. Have enough food and water for each person and each pet for at least one week. Be sure to fill your prescriptions and have medicine on hand, as well as phone chargers, radios, batteries, extra cash and fill up car's gas tanks. Trim trees on your property, install approved impact resistant protection for windows and doors, and collect loose outdoor items, then find a safe location for your vehicle. Many people rely on the assistance of neighbors before and after hurricanes, help your neighbors collect the supplies they will need before the storm. Assist them with evacuation if ordered to do so and stay in touch with them after the storm has passed. It is very important to put your complete plan in writing. Have an insurance checkup review by your insurance agent and visit www.floodsmart.gov.

The following is a summary of items to check in a single-family house at any time of the year, safety of family and neighbors must be a priority for every home owner.

The structural components in a dwelling could become a critical safety hazard if you don't inspect them periodically, taking a look at your attic you will be able to determine if water intrusion may be causing damage to your roof structure, older homes may have metal connectors from truss to wall, or sheathing fasteners made of non-corrosion resistant materials, therefore it is a good idea to go up into your attic after strong storms to look around and verify that the event did not cause structural damage, and water is not coming into the attic causing corrosion or mold which is a very serious health issue, it is always recommended to have a pull down ladder to access your attic to reduce the risk of a fall.



Remember that doors providing access to the habitable space of the house from the garage must be made of solid wood. This will provide fire rating of 20 minutes along with self-closing and latching hardware.

Windows are a very important structural component of dwellings. Make sure that the integrity of your windows is not compromised due to broken parts, missing or corroded fasteners. Also, check for water intrusion through windows which may result into mold in the conditioned area.

Staircases and steps are a frequent cause of falls for people of all ages. Many staircase falls could be prevented by a properly installed handrail, as mandated by the Florida building code. While anyone can fall on a stairway, these falls are especially dangerous to people with disabilities, older people who may be suffering mobility or balance problems. If you periodically check the attachment of your railings to the floor or to the wall, you may prevent a tragedy.

Drowning in residential pools is a major concern. The first and best way to prevent drowning is constant adult supervision for children, and medically-frail elderly residents. Drowning or near-drowning injuries take only a few minutes to happen and occur in oceans, lakes, quarries, rivers, swimming pools, hot tubs, bathtubs, toilets, retention ponds, and even buckets. Drowning is a leading cause of accidental death especially for children under age five. Drowning is a significant cause of death for medically-frail elderly people. For every child who drowns, three receive emergency medical care. Such injuries too often cause brain damage ranging from long-term disabilities, memory problems, and learning disabilities.

Access to a Swimming Pool, Spa, or Hot Tub—As a back-up to constant adult supervision, Florida law requires the use of one or more safety features listed below.

- Approved safety pool cover.
- Exit alarm with specified volume equipped on all doors and windows with direct access to the pool.
- Self-closing, self-latching device, minimum 54" above the ground on all doors (including gates) with direct access to the pool.

Another safety concern that should be evaluated is the entrapment, which means getting stuck in a drain due to suction. This may result in drowning. It is important that all pool users stay clear of drains or suction fittings. If a person becomes entrapped, immediately turn off the pump and get air into the plumbing system to release the suction, break the cover over the pump basket or the piping in front of the pump.

Another cause of accidents can be the means of egress from your house. Regardless of the size of the house, at least one egress door should be provided. The required door should provide access from the habitable portion of the home to the outside without going through a garage. The required door must be a side-hinged door, and it must be at least 3 feet wide and 6 feet 8 inches tall. Other doors do not need to meet these minimum dimensions. They can be of any size and need not be a swinging type. All egress doors shall be readily operable from the inside without the use of a tool, a key or special knowledge or effort. This standard allows a wide variety of hardware options. Bedrooms, *habitable attics* and every sleeping room shall have not less than one operable emergency escape and rescue opening having a minimum opening area of 5.7 square feet or 5 square feet if the opening is located at the first floor, the net clear height opening shall be not less than 24 inches, the net clear width shall be not less than 20 inches, and the maximum window sill height shall be 44 inches above the finished floor. Safety is everyone's business and we encourage you to become involved in your community and report an unsafe situation.