

# Health and Safety Considerations

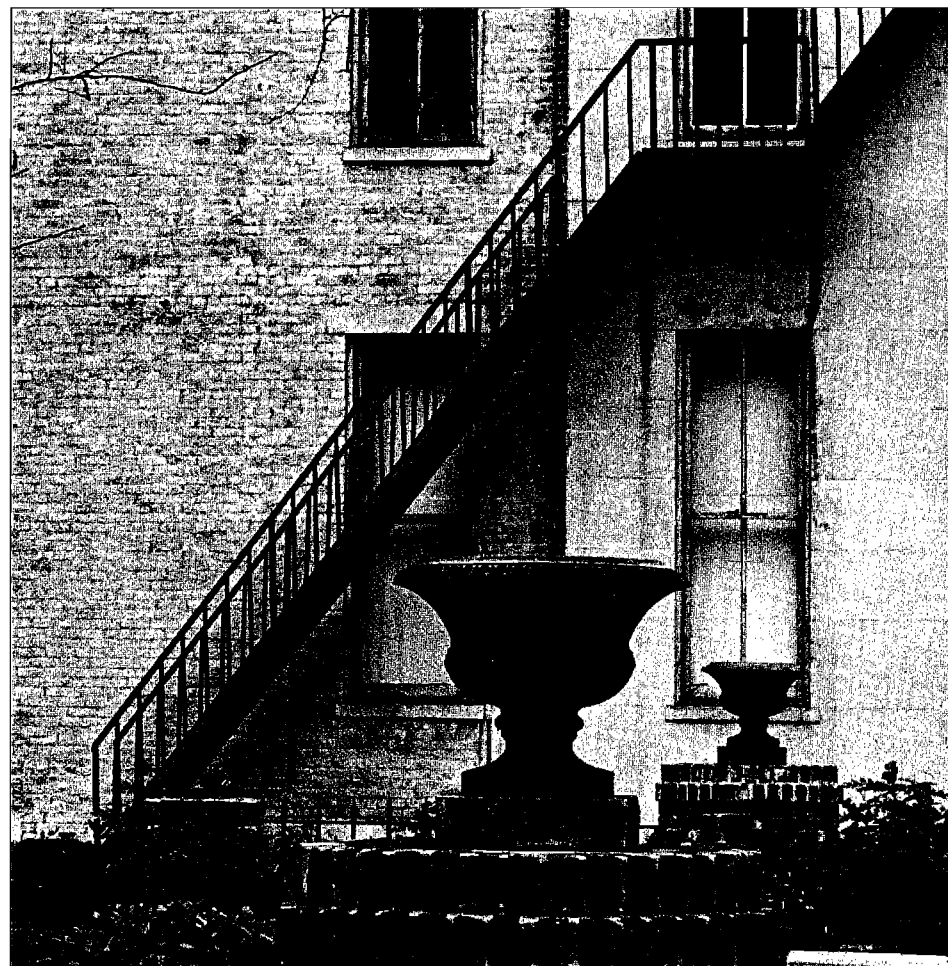


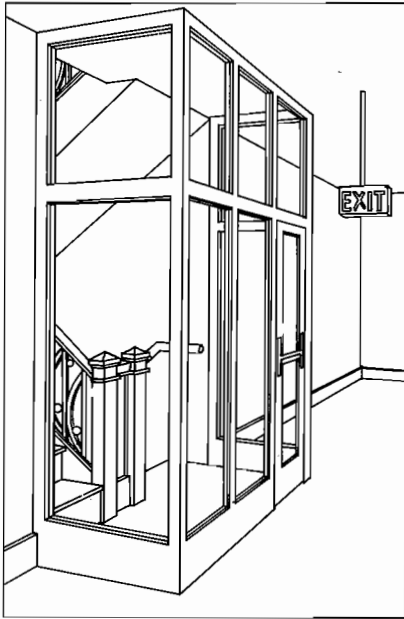
# Health and Safety Considerations

In undertaking rehabilitation work on historic buildings, it is necessary to consider the impact that meeting current health and safety codes (public health, occupational health, life safety, fire safety, electrical, structural and building codes) will have on character-defining spaces, features, and finishes. Special coordination with the responsible code officials at the state, county or municipal level may be required. Securing required building permits and occupancy licenses is best accomplished early in rehabilitation planning.

In the area of occupational health, research on older, more commonly used building materials (insulation, floor and wall coverings and lead paints) indicates that the presence of toxic substances in them is potentially hazardous to building occupants. Following careful investigation and analysis, some form of abatement may be required such as encapsulation, or partial or total removal. All workers involved in the encapsulation, repair, or removal of known toxic materials should be adequately trained and

should wear proper personal protective equipment. Finally, preventive and routine maintenance programs for historic structures known to contain such materials should also be developed to include proper warnings and precautions.





*Existing decorative staircases in historic buildings may meet safety requirements if enclosed with safety glass. This enclosure preserves the stairs while providing a secure means of egress.*

#### Recommended

Identifying the historic building's character-defining spaces, features, and finishes so that code-required work will not result in their damage or loss.

Complying with health and safety codes, including seismic code requirements, in such a manner that character-defining spaces, features, and finishes are preserved.

Removing toxic building materials only after thorough testing has been conducted and only after less invasive abatement methods have been shown to be inadequate.

Providing workers with appropriate personal protective equipment for hazards found in the worksite.

Working with local code officials to investigate systems, methods, or devices of equivalent or superior effectiveness and safety to those prescribed by code so that unnecessary alterations can be avoided.

Upgrading historic stairways and elevators to meet health and safety codes in a manner that assures their preservation, i.e., so that they are not damaged or obscured.

#### Not Recommended

Undertaking code-required alterations to a building or site before identifying those spaces, features, or finishes which are character-defining and must therefore be preserved.

Altering, damaging, or destroying character-defining spaces, features, and finishes while making modifications to a building or site to comply with safety codes.

Destroying historic interior features and finishes without careful testing and without considering less invasive abatement methods.

Removing unhealthful building materials without regard to personal and environmental safety.

Making changes to historic buildings without first exploring equivalent health and safety systems, methods, or devices that may be less damaging to historic spaces, features, and finishes.

Damaging or obscuring historic stairways and elevators or altering adjacent spaces in the process of doing work to meet code requirements.

*A sprinkler system has been sensitively installed in this highly ornamental plaster ceiling during the building's rehabilitation. Sprinkler heads have been unobtrusively located in the center of the decorative plaster relief.*



#### Recommended

Installing sensitively designed fire suppression systems, such as sprinkler systems that result in retention of historic features and finishes.

---

Applying fire-retardant coatings, such as intumescent paints, which expand during fire to add thermal protection to steel.

#### Not Recommended

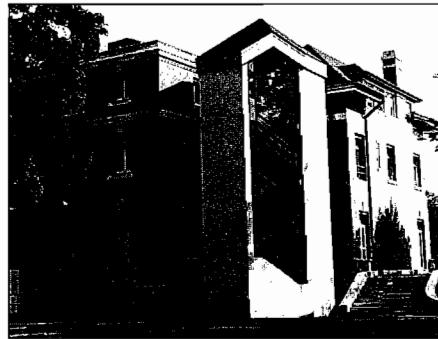
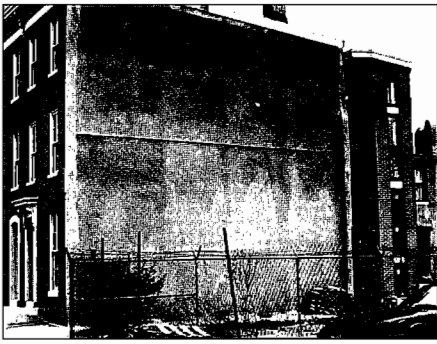
Covering character-defining wood features with fire-resistant sheathing which results in altering their visual appearance.

Using fire-retardant coatings if they damage or obscure character-defining features.

### Recommended

Adding a new stairway or elevator to meet health and safety codes in a manner that preserves adjacent character-defining features and spaces.

Placing a code-required stairway or elevator that cannot be accommodated within the historic building in a new exterior addition. Such an addition should be on an inconspicuous elevation.



*In order to comply with safety codes, it may be necessary to add an exterior fire stair to a historic building as part of a rehabilitation project. The brick stairtower shown on the top is compatible in materials and scale, and inconspicuously attached to the rear elevation of the historic rowhouse. The example on the bottom shows a large-scale concrete and glass stairtower that is incompatible in materials and scale, located as it is on a highly visible elevation of the historic brick building.*

*In buildings such as this historic courthouse, where old lead-based paint is essentially intact and covered with a lead-free topcoat, removing the historic paint because of potential toxicity may not be necessary. Historic paint can provide valuable documentation about the evolution of a building and should be retained, whenever possible.*

### Not Recommended

Radically changing, damaging, or destroying character-defining spaces, features, or finishes when adding a new code-required stairway or elevator.

Constructing a new addition to accommodate code-required stairs and elevators on character-defining elevations highly visible from the street; or where it obscures, damages, or destroys character-defining features.

