



**City of Houston
Building Inspection
CODE WORD 2006**

INTERPRETATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF
THE HOUSTON ADOPTED CODES
2006 IBC, 2006 IRC, 2011 NEC, 2006 UMC, 2006 UPC,
2006 IECC, 2009 IECC and ASHRAE 90.1-2007

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PUBLICATION:	Revision May 29 , 2013				
SUBJECT:	Horizontal Exits in Conjunction with Section 503.1				
CODE(S):	Building				
SECTION(S)	503.1 and 705.1				

Section 503.1 of the building code allows buildings separated by fire walls to be considered “separate buildings” for purposes of allowable areas. With this provision a lesser type of construction may be utilized. When a fire wall is used to create separate buildings and gain the benefits the code allows, the exiting systems, as well as other code provisions, are reviewed independently for each separate building.

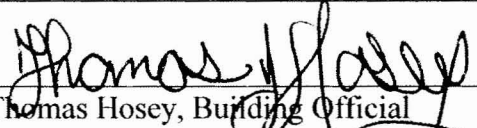
Section 705.1 reinforces this further by stating that areas separated by a fire wall “shall be considered separate buildings”. There is a key distinction between a “fire area” and a “building separated by a fire wall to create **separate buildings**”. A fire wall within a building that is used for some other purpose other than to create a separate building (Section 503.1) may achieve code compliance for building elements, such as exits in areas outside of a fire area, since those other areas are not considered separate buildings. In addition an exit through this Fire wall is not typically considered a horizontal exit. However, where fire walls are used to create “separate buildings” code compliance, including exits, is required to be determined fully within the confines of each “separate building”. When an exit is located in a Fire wall used to create a separate buildings on each side (Section 503.1) it is defined as a horizontal exit.

In Chapter 10 a horizontal exit is defined as “A path of egress travel from one building to an area in **another building** on approximately the same level...”

Horizontal exits may be used, and are a valid design element, as part of the exiting system when multiple buildings are created per the requirements of Section 503.1. However, **horizontal exits are limited** in Section 1022 so that a “horizontal exit shall not serve as the only exit from a portion of a building, and where two or more exits are required, not more than one-half of the total number of exits or total exit width shall be horizontal exits.”

Therefore a structure separated by fire walls into “separate buildings” may have horizontal exits for up to one-half of the total number of required exits. The remaining exits, and not less than one, must be provided by a vertical enclosure, exit passageway, or exterior exit.

This interpretation is applicable to all building plans submitted on or after June 30, 2013.

Approved: 
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