

CHAPTER 3 BUILDING PLANNING

SECTION R311.5.6.1 2003 Edition IRC Interpretation No. 23-08 Issued: 11-18-2008 RE_03_23_08

311.5.6.1 Height. Handrail height, measured vertically from the sloped plane adjoining the tread nosing, or finish surface of ramp slope, shall be not less than 34 inches (864 mm) and not more than 38 inches (965 mm).

REFERENCED SECTION:

311.5.6.2 Continuity. Handrails for stairways shall be continuous for the full length of the flight, from a point directly above the top riser of the flight to a point directly above lowest riser of the flight. Handrail ends shall be returned or shall terminate in newel posts or safety terminals. Handrails adjacent to a wall shall have a space of not less than 1 1/2 inch (38 mm) between the wall and the handrails.

Exceptions:

1. Handrails shall be permitted to be interrupted by a newel post at the turn.
2. The use of a volute, turnout, starting easing or starting newel shall be allowed over the lowest tread.



Q: Where a handrail is terminated with the use of a volute over the lowest tread as permitted in Section R311.5.6.2 of the *2003 International Residential Code*, is the height of the volute above the lowest tread required to be within 34 inches and 38 inches in accordance the provisions of Section R311.5.6.1?

A: No. The volute is a decorative ornamentation and is considered to be separate from the actual handrail and is therefore allowed to exceed the 38-inch height restriction.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION RELEVANT TO PROPOSED COMMITTEE INTERPRETATION 23-08

Section R311.5.6.1 in the *2007 Supplement to the 2006 International Residential Code* contains two exceptions that will be included in the *2009 International Residential Code*. Although Exceptions 1 and 2, see below, are not part of the requirements provided in the edition in question, they are relevant and do provide some clarity to the application of the published requirements.

Section R311.5.6.1 of the *2007 Supplement* not shown (see above);

Exceptions:

1. The use of a volute, turnout, or starting easing shall be allowed over the lowest tread.
2. When handrail transitions are used to provide continuous transition between flights, the transition from handrail to guardrail or used at the start of a flight, the handrail height at the transition shall be permitted to exceed the maximum height.

The proponent's reason for the code change follows:

Reason: Starting fittings are permitted to interrupt the rail and are commonly used to include gooseneck fittings and decorative volutes to provide continuity. These highly sought starting fittings include, historically accepted aesthetic practice in stairway construction and design, they provide a safe closed ending for the handrail, and have little effect on continuity. As the user approaches the stair, if they use the handrail, the users hand is extended in front of the body more than the distance of one tread to grasp the rail. This kind of usage can be documented by the visually apparent wear marks on rails. Essentially the handrail in the area over the lowest tread sees little use. Starting fittings are allowed to break continuity of a rail over the lowest tread. This means that no handrail is required in this area. If no handrail is required in this area

whatever is permitted to be there should not have to meet the handrail height. Please see graphic below. A similar situation occurs at the top of stairs where the gooseneck fitting ascends to connect to the next fitting to provide a continuous rail. At this location the top of the gooseneck will often extend above the maximum handrail height within 4 to 5 inches of the top nosing.

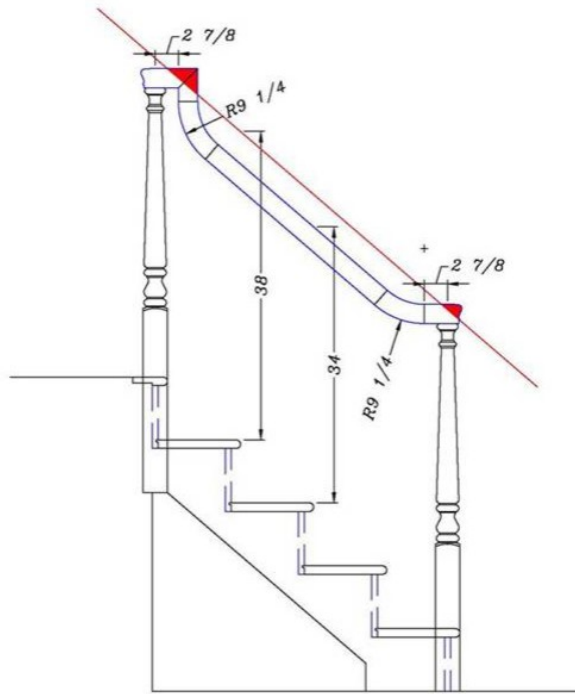


FIGURE R311.5.6.1, CI 23-08