

SF Section 604 Quick Reference Guide

San Francisco's Annual Inspection Requirements Explained

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What Is SF Housing Code Section 604?

San Francisco Housing Code Section 604 requires periodic structural inspections of exterior building appendages (balconies, decks, fire escapes, etc.) to ensure safety for building occupants and the public.

Purpose

Protect residents and passersby from structural failures of exterior elevated elements through mandatory periodic inspections and documentation.

Applicability: Does Section 604 Apply to Your Building?

Building Types Covered

Residential Buildings:

- Apartment buildings with **3 or more units**

Commercial Buildings:

- Hotels with **6 or more guest rooms**

Structures Covered

Weather-exposed (“non-interior”) **wood or metal components**, including:

- Decks and balconies
- Landings and platforms
- Exit corridors and stair systems
- Guardrails and handrails
- Fire escapes or parts thereof
- Any exterior elevated elements exposed to weather

Key Requirements

Inspection Interval

Requirement	Timeline
Inspection Frequency	Every 5 years
Affidavit Submission	Every 5 years (aligned with inspection cycle)

Who Can Inspect

Only the following qualified professionals may perform Section 604 inspections:

- Licensed general contractor
- Structural pest control licensee
- Licensed architect
- Licensed engineer

Inspection Goals

The inspector must verify that all covered elements are:

1. In a **“generally safe condition”**

2. In **adequate working order**
 3. Free from **hazardous dry rot, fungus, deterioration, or decay**
 4. Free from **improper alterations** that compromise structural integrity
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Compliance Process

Step 1: Schedule Inspection

Schedule your inspection **well in advance** of your 5-year compliance deadline to allow time for any necessary repairs.

Step 2: Hire Qualified Inspector

Ensure your inspector meets the licensing requirements:

- General contractor
- Structural pest control licensee
- Architect
- Engineer

Step 3: Perform Full Visual Inspection

The inspector will examine **all exterior appendages** for:

- Structural integrity
- Signs of decay or deterioration
- Proper installation and alterations
- Safety hazards

Step 4: Prepare Compliance Affidavit

After inspection, the licensed inspector must sign a **Compliance Affidavit** provided by the Department of Building Inspection (DBI).

Step 5: Submit to DBI

Submit the signed affidavit to:

San Francisco Department of Building Inspection

Housing Inspection Services Division

Email: dbi.hissection604@sfgov.org

Methods: Mail, fax, or email

Step 6: Address Any Issues Found

If inspection reveals decay, damage, or safety concerns:

- Plan for necessary repairs immediately
- Obtain required permits
- Document all repair work

Step 7: Maintain Documentation

Keep copies of:

- Inspection reports
- Signed affidavits
- Submission receipts
- Repair records and permits

Why Section 604 Matters

Safety

Prevents structural failures of exterior appendages that could harm occupants or passersby.

Legal Liability Protection

Having documented, licensed inspections protects building owners legally if issues surface later.

Maintenance Planning

Inspection reports inform maintenance schedules and reserve budgeting for property managers and HOAs.

Complement to State Laws

Section 604 is **not the same** as state-level inspection laws like SB 326 or SB 721:

- Covers some structures (e.g., **metal fire escapes**) that state laws might not
 - Has different inspection intervals (5 years vs. 6 or 9 years)
 - Applies specifically to San Francisco properties
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Common Challenges & Pitfalls

1. Confusion with Other Inspection Laws

Problem: Property owners assume SB 326 or SB 721 inspections satisfy Section 604 requirements.

Solution: These are **separate requirements**. You may need multiple inspections to comply with all applicable laws.

2. Unqualified Inspectors

Problem: Hiring the wrong type of professional leads to noncompliance.

Solution: Verify inspector licensing before engagement. Ensure they meet Section 604 requirements.

3. Missing the 5-Year Cycle

Problem: Failing to track inspection deadlines or submit affidavits on time triggers enforcement.

Solution: Set calendar reminders 6 months before deadline. Schedule inspections early.

4. Access Coordination

Problem: Exterior appendages (especially fire escapes) may require tenant coordination for access.

Solution: Plan inspections well in advance and communicate with residents early.

Enforcement & Penalties

Mandatory Compliance

The code states: “**Property owners shall provide proof of compliance every five years.**”

Code Enforcement Proceedings

Failure to submit completed/signed affidavits triggers **code enforcement proceedings** against non-compliant property owners.

Potential Penalties

While specific published dollar amounts vary, enforcement actions may include:

- Code violation notices
- Fines and penalties
- Mandatory catch-up inspections
- Required immediate repairs
- Potential legal liability if incidents occur

Risk Mitigation

Best practice: Treat Section 604 compliance as mandatory and budget for:

- Inspection costs
- Affidavit preparation and submission
- Any repairs identified during inspection
- Potential enforcement costs if deadlines are missed

Quick Reference: Section 604 vs. State Laws

Feature	SF Section 604	SB 721 (Apartments)	SB 326 (HOAs/Condos)
Jurisdiction	San Francisco only	Statewide (CA)	Statewide (CA)
Applies To	Apartments (3+ units), Hotels (6+ rooms)	Multifamily rental (3+ units)	Common interest developments
Inspection Cycle	Every 5 years	Every 6 years	Every 9 years
First Deadline	Varies by property	January 1, 2026	January 1, 2025
Inspector	Contractor, pest control, architect, or engineer	SE, architect, or qualified contractor	SE or architect only
Structures	Wood/metal exterior elements	Wood-based EEEs	Wood-based EEEs
Unique Coverage	Metal fire escapes, hotels	N/A	N/A
Submission	Affidavit to DBI	Report to owner	Report to HOA board

Inspection & Affidavit Cycle Summary

Every 5 years, owners of:

- Apartment buildings (3+ units), or
- Hotels (6+ guest rooms)

Must have **all exterior elevated elements** (wood or metal decks, balconies, landings, stairways, fire escapes, guardrails/handrails) in weather-exposed areas inspected by a qualified person.

After inspection, a **Compliance Affidavit** (provided by DBI) must be signed by the inspector and submitted to DBI's Housing Inspection Services Division.

Fees & Code Enforcement Program

DBI's Housing Inspection Services program levies **annual fees** on apartment houses, condominiums, and hotels for inspection and enforcement services.

Example fees (2025):

- One- and two-family dwelling rentals: \$140 per unit per year
- Multi-family buildings: Fees vary by size and type

These fees support the city's housing code enforcement infrastructure.

Key Takeaways for Property Owners

1. Confirm Applicability

Determine whether your building is subject to Section 604:

- Apartment building with 3+ units?
- Hotel with 6+ rooms?
- Located in San Francisco?

2. Check Compliance Status

Verify when the last inspection/affidavit was completed. If more than 5 years ago, you are **overdue**.

3. Budget Appropriately

Plan for:

- Inspection costs (500–2,000 depending on building size)
- Affidavit preparation and submission
- Repairs identified during inspection
- Potential enforcement costs if delayed

4. Maintain Documentation

Keep all records for:

- Transfer/sale transactions
- Insurance requirements
- Financing applications
- Liability protection

5. Don' t Confuse with State Laws

Section 604 is **separate from** SB 721 and SB 326. You may need to comply with multiple inspection requirements.

Why Choose PassUP for Your Section 604 Inspection?

Licensed Professionals

California-licensed engineers and contractors qualified to perform Section 604 inspections.

48-Hour Report Turnaround

Fast, efficient service to help you meet deadlines without delays.

Comprehensive Coverage

We handle all San Francisco inspection requirements including Section 604, plus state-level SB 721 and SB 326 compliance.

AI-Enhanced Accuracy

30% higher defect detection rate using advanced thermal imaging and analysis algorithms.

Transparent Pricing

Instant online quotes with no hidden fees. Know your costs upfront.

Full Documentation Support

We prepare and assist with affidavit submission to DBI, ensuring complete compliance.

Contact PassUP Today

Don't risk code enforcement actions!

Schedule your Section 604 inspection now to ensure compliance and protect your property.

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Useful Resources

- **SF DBI Housing Inspection Services** - dbi.hissection604@sfgov.org
 - **SF Housing Code Section 604** - Official legal text
 - **PassUP Blog** - Educational articles on San Francisco compliance
 - **Free Consultation** - Call us to discuss your specific property needs
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Disclaimer: This guide provides general information and should not be construed as legal advice. Property owners should consult with qualified legal counsel and licensed professionals regarding specific compliance obligations. Information current as of November 2025.

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