



**New and Replacement Windows  
International Residential Code (IRC) 2015  
IT'S THE LAW – EGRESS WINDOW REQUIREMENTS**

Permit Submittal Requirements:

1. Permit Application
2. Certification of Applicant Status
3. Floor plan showing: (2 copies)
  - a. the proposed location and dimensions of the windows (see illustration);
  - b. Include on plan the existing sill height of each proposed new or replacement window. If the sill heights exceed the 44” maximum, the sills will be required to be lowered to comply with egress requirements. (Please note that only a single (1) egress window is required from each sleeping room.)
4. Energy values for each window - the IECC/ WSEC require windows with a maximum “U-value” of 0.30
5. Plan check fee (based on valuation of work)

Exemptions: *A permit will not be required to replace two (2) like for like windows, if the egress requirements noted below are met.*

**IRC 2015 Pertains to All Single Family and Two-Family Homes**

An egress window is a window that is required in specific location in a dwelling and is intended to provide an emergency means of exiting a dwelling. Windows must meet specific size and requirements to qualify as an egress window. The intent of the code is to keep you and loved one safe by requiring a means of egress in living spaces. The reason for needing a means of egress are twofold: to allow for an exit in case of an emergency; and, to provide access for a firefighter to gain entrance.

An overview of section R310 of the code that is applicable to egress windows:

Egress windows (or doors) are required in every habitable space. Especially in any room used for sleeping purposes, it will require its own egress window. If you have an existing home and you add a sleeping room, or finish a separate living space in the basement, the code requires that you install an egress window to serve these spaces. Without a means of egress, these rooms can represent a dangerous fire trap if you do not have a quick and easy to operate emergency egress window. If you have a basement that has a bedroom, recreation room, den, family room, media room, office or home gym, all of these rooms are required to have a means of egress.

What are the size requirements for an egress window?

An egress window must satisfy four International Residential Code criteria:

1. Minimum width of opening: 20 in.
2. Minimum height of opening: 24 in.
3. Minimum net clear opening: 5.7 sq. ft. (5.0 sq. ft. for ground floor)
4. Maximum sill height above floor: 44 in.

The window must have a minimum net clear opening of 5.7 sq. ft. Net clear refers to the actual free and clear space that exists when the window is open. It is not the rough opening size or the glass panel size, but the actual opening a person can crawl through.

The window opening must be operational from the inside without keys or tools. Bars, grilles and grates may be installed over windows but must be operational without tools or keys and still allow the minimum clear opening.

You might assume that a 20-in by 24-in. window would be acceptable for egress. However, those dimensions would yield a net clear opening of only 3.3 sq. ft. To achieve the required net clear opening of 5.7sq. ft., a 20-in wide window would have to be 42 in. high. Likewise, a 24-in high window would have to be 34-in. wide.

### Must I use a special type of window?

**Casement windows** with hinged sashes that swing free and clear of the opening can be relatively small and still meet egress requirements. This makes them ideal for basement egress and for other areas where space is limited.

### Why don't my windows meet egress requirements?

Some older homes were built before there were any egress window requirements. Many more homes were built when the egress window net free opening size was 5 sq. ft. Yet, even newer homes often lack proper egress windows. Attics and basements were often legally remodeled into family rooms or offices (which didn't require egress windows) then later converted into bedrooms (which now do require them). When bedrooms are added to basements, homeowners often unwittingly replace large egress windows with small, non-egress windows. And, while the code will require egress windows to be installed when bedrooms are added on, they won't necessarily dictate that windows in existing bedrooms be enlarged to egress size; it's simply too difficult to monitor every situation.

Required or not, egress windows are crucial lifesaving equipment. If a room has even the remote possibility of later becoming a bedroom, include an egress size window.

### Basement Egress Windows

Besides the height, width, and overall square-footage requirements that the basement egress window must meet, there are certain requirements for the window well surrounding the window.

Window wells must:

1. Allow the rescue window opening to be fully opened.
2. Provide 9 sq. ft. of "floor area," with a minimum dimension of 36 in. in width and in length.
3. Contain a permanently affixed ladder or steps for climbing out, if the window well depth exceeds 44 inches in depth. The ladder must be at least 12 in. wide and project no less than 3 in. from the window well. It can't be obstructed by the open window or encroach on the required window well dimensions by more than 6 in.
4. If an egress window is located under a deck or porch, the code requires at least 48 inches between the top of the window well and the bottom of the deck or porch joists.

### Replacement Windows:

If you're replacing a smaller window with a larger one that meets egress requirements, bear in mind that enlarging the height of the opening takes less structural work than enlarging the width. Increasing width might mean installing a larger, beefier horizontal structural header over the window opening – a major project. Increasing height is often only a matter of lowering the height of the sill below the window. If you are replacing windows in your home, there are some circumstances whereby you may need to comply with the requirements for egress windows.