Building Standards Advisory

Promoting construction of safe, healthy, habitable buildings

Bedroom Windows

Question

"What are the minimum requirements for bedroom windows in homes?"

Answer

The National Building Code (NBC) requires a minimum size and that they serve the purpose of providing natural ventilation and emergency escape requirements.

Compliance with *The Uniform Building and Accessibility Standards Act*, Regulations and the National Building Code of Canada 2010 (NBC 2010) is addressed in this advisory. Words in italics, other than Act titles, are defined in the NBC 2010.

Background

The NBC 2010 includes general provisions for the placement of windows, doors, and skylights. Specific to bedroom windows, **Division B, Sentence 9.7.2.2.(2)** states:

Windows and doors installed to provide the required *means of egress* from bedrooms shall conform to Subsection 9.9.10.

This ensures that a *means of egress* is available to the occupants in the event of an emergency.

The NBC 2010 specifically addresses emergency escape in **Division B, Article 9.9.10.1., Egress Windows or Doors for Bedrooms** which states:

1) Except where the *suite* is *sprinklered*, each bedroom or combination bedroom shall have at least one outside window or exterior door openable from the inside without the use of keys, tools or special knowledge and without the removal of sashes or hardware. (See Article 9.5.1.2. and Appendix A.)
2) The window referred to in Sentence (1) shall
   a) Provide an unobstructed opening of not less than .35 m^2 in area with no dimension less than 380 mm, and
   b) Maintain the required opening during an emergency without the need for additional support. (See Appendix A.)

The Appendix reference **Division B, 9.9.10.1.(1)** states:

Sentence 9.9.10.1.(1) generally requires every bedroom in an unsprinklered suite to have at least one window or door opening to the outside that is large enough and easy enough to open so that it can be used as an exit in the event that a fire prevents use of the building's normal exits. The minimum unobstructed opening specified for escape windows must be achievable using only the normal window operating procedure. The escape path must not go through nor open onto another room, floor or space. Where a bedroom is located in an unsprinklered suite in a basement, an escape window or door must be located in the bedroom. It is not sufficient to rely on egress through other basement space to another escape window or door.

Window Placement

Although the height of a window above the floor surface can pose a challenge for emergency escape, there is no set maximum sill height for bedroom windows in the NBC. Therefore, it is possible to install a window that satisfies the requirements, but defeats the intent when the sill is so high that it cannot be reached for escape purposes. It is recommended that the sills of windows intended for use as emergency escape be not higher than 1.5 m (5 ft) above the floor. When it is unavoidable to have a sill height higher than 1.5 m, access to the window should be improved by some means, such as built-in furniture installed below the window.

A window in a basement bedroom may open into a window well depending upon the height of the finished grade. When a bedroom window opens into a window well a minimum clearance must be maintained between the window and the window-well. The NBC 2010 prescribes the minimum clearance in **Division B, Sentence 9.9.10.1.(3**) which states:

Where a window required in Sentence 91) opens into a window well, a clearance of not less than 760 mm shall be provided in front of the window. (See Appendix A.)

The minimum clearance in front of the window should be measured from the front of the window and the facing wall of the window well. Once this clearance is provided, no additional clearance is needed for windows with sliders, casements, or inward swinging awning style windows. However, for windows with outward swinging awnings additional clearance is need to provide the required 760 mm beyond the outer edge of the sash.

Window wells often have acrylic or plastic lids offering protection from the elements. In the event of an emergency, these enclosures must be openable without the use of keys, tools, or special knowledge.

Other Window Considerations

Ice build-up that prevents or restricts opening a window is a concern with any type of window. With improved heating and ventilating systems in houses and improved window construction, ice build-up appears to be less of a concern that it may have been in the past.

Latches incorporated on the inside of the window frame are not considered to require special knowledge to release. These latches are typically engaged, for security or to ensure the window is shut tightly, and released as part of the normal opening process.

Insect screens, security bars, grilles, or similar devices should be easily removable or releasable from the inside without the use of a key, tool, or special knowledge.

Children who are expected to escape through a bedroom window on their own should be taught how to open the window and remove or release any screens or bars that may be installed. Home fire drills should include practice in using the window as a means of escape. For those people who are too young or physically infirm to escape on their own through a window, special precautions such as a smoke detector in the bedroom to assist with early detection or relocating their bedroom to the first storey or closer to the door to assist with their rescue, might be considered.

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