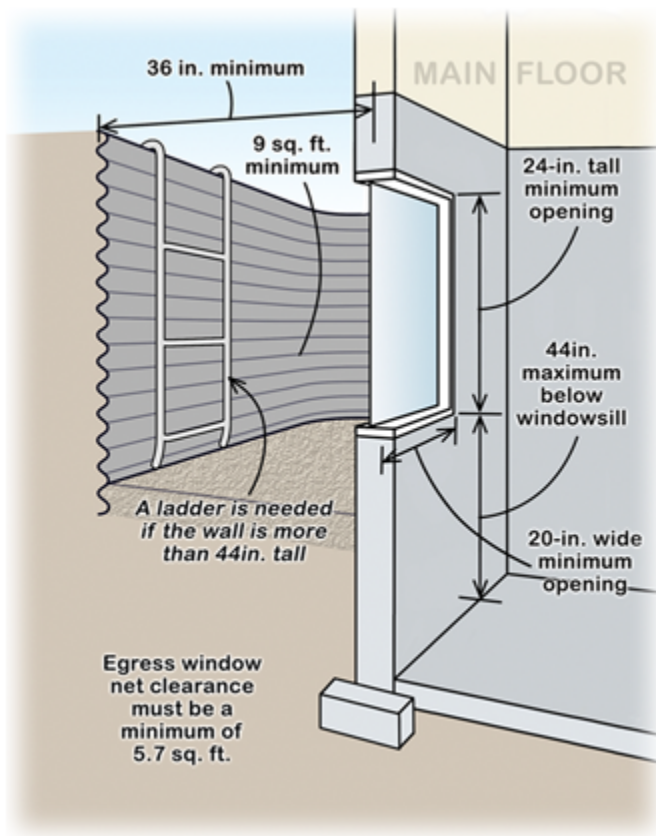


Basement Bedroom Requirements - Rules and Regulations

The word “egress” is often used when talking about basement bedroom requirements. For many people, it is the first time they hear it. And for quite a few, basement egress requirements become curse words.

In addition to egress, the IRC has many other finished basement bedroom code requirements. Building to the code turns the space into a true bedroom that can be listed as such when selling. Which increases resale value.

Note: Most of these code items are also in place for above-grade bedrooms. Along with additional and different regulations covering things such as egress, electrical, HVAC, and more.



Courtesy: [Pinterest](#) - Cross-section drawing of basement egress window installation.

The International Residential Code

Anything that can be built is covered by a code, including basement bedrooms. The [International Residential Code \(IRC\)](#) is used as the basis of most local codes. (Up to 90% of US communities have adopted this code.) It is updated every 3 years.

Make sure that you consult local building codes. Most of them tailor their building codes to local conditions. Some of those conditions may include:

- **Drainage.** Local water tables may require special window well drainage codes.
- **Encroachment.** How close can parts of a house be to the neighbors?
- **Basement Suites.** Legal or not. Allowed or not.
- **Community Standards.** For instance, over 55 communities may have filed a covenant with the city with certain restrictions.

Basement Bedroom Egress Requirements

The [Cambridge Dictionary](#) defines egress as “the act or way of leaving a place”. The International Residential Code (IRC) has minimum requirements for egress windows in all bedrooms, not just bedrooms in the basement.

Bedrooms are required to have two means of egress. One is obviously the door. The other must open directly out of the building. There can be two doors and no windows in the bedroom, as long as one door opens directly outside.

The IRC has certain minimum requirements for egress windows. Basement egress minimums:

- **Width and Height.** The opening of the window must be a minimum of 20” wide and a minimum of 24” high. This is the open area, not the window sash.
- **Open Area.** The window shall provide at least 5.7 square feet of open, unobstructed area.
- **Height From Floor.** The bottom of the window cannot be more than 44” from the floor. It also must be no closer to the floor than 24”. One dimension allows people to get out of the window. The other helps prevent them from falling out.
- **Tools and Knowledge.** The window has to be relatively easy to open without tools, keys, or special knowledge. Awning windows do not qualify as egress windows because of the need to disconnect the scissor arm before it opens completely.

Note: Check your local fire codes. Egress windows are not only for letting the occupants get out. They also provide access to firefighters and other emergency personnel, even with equipment strapped on.

Basement Egress Window Wells

Basement egress window wells require a little extra space. For just a hole in the ground, they are a little complicated. Any window that is even partially below grade should have a window well around it to allow light and ventilation.

If it is an egress window, the well has to be big enough to allow the window to open and the person to escape or the firefighters to get in.

IRC says that the back of the window well has to be at least 36" away from the window. Enough clearance for an adult to get into and out of both the window and the well. The floor of the well can be no less than 9 square feet (length x width). If the egress window is a casement, it must be able to open fully without touching the well.

Any well that is more than 44" into the ground requires a permanent ladder to allow people to reach ground level. Ladder rings must be no less than 12" wide, 18" apart, and extend no more than 6" into the well.

Note: None of the window wells I ever installed met that ladder code. 44" is too much for smaller kids or someone with a physical problem. I installed ladders in every well over 24" deep, and the rungs were 12" apart like a normal ladder.

Many deeper window wells—over two feet—have covers that allow light, but keep animals and clumsy people from falling into them. And snow and rain from accumulating, although there should be a drain pipe down to the weeping tile. The covers should have a latch or two inside that prevent them from blowing open or off.

The latches should be easy to operate—even for children. (A little fire drill training is never a bad thing.) Your latches will not slow down firefighters. They have axes.

The following YouTube video shows how a window well and egress window are installed.

 [Egress Basement Window Installation | How To | DIY Home Improvement](#)

Basement Bedroom Size

The bedroom must have 70 square feet of floor area. No dimension less than seven feet. For one person. Each additional sleeper over one year old requires an extra 50 square feet. At least half of the ceiling must be at least seven feet high.

Basement Bedroom Window Light and Ventilation

Although the bedroom will likely have electrical lights and an HVAC system, the IRC has more to say about your window or windows.

All bedrooms must have at least one window. The total area of glass must be a minimum of 8% of the bedroom's floor area. The total maximum open area of the window or windows must be at least 4% of the floor area.

Basement Bedroom Access

Every bedroom must have individual access. To and from hallways or other living spaces. You cannot access one bedroom through another.

Basement Bedroom Heating

A space heater is not an acceptable basement bedroom heat system. The room's heat source must be able to maintain a temperature of 68 degrees F. A furnace vent, radiator, or heating unit is acceptable.

Basement Bedroom Electrical

The bedroom must contain a minimum of two electrical outlets.

Basement Bedroom Smoke and CO Alarms

Smoke alarms must be located close to any location where people sleep. Not necessarily inside the bedroom. Some jurisdictions require new homes with attached garages or gas appliances to have a carbon monoxide alarm in each bedroom. Usually, existing homes do not have to comply.

Basement Bedroom Closets

Hooray. The IRC has no comment about closets.

