



Window Egress

The building codes define "means of egress" and an exit system that provides a continuous, unobstructed and undiminished path of exit travel from any occupied point in a building or structure to a public way. Means of egress are required by the building codes to provide a point of emergency escape and rescue. The codes require at least one emergency escape and rescue opening in every sleeping room and basement with habitable space. This is typical of buildings not exceeding four floors in height.

Means of egress for residential windows, as defined in the major building codes, address issues relative to minimum clear opening dimensions, height of the window sill and operation of the window. To facilitate emergency egress, building codes state that windows used as a means of egress be operable from the inside without the use of separate tools or keys.

ICC: *The International Residential Code for One and Two Family Dwellings*,
Chapter 3, Section R310 (2000)

Sill height shall not exceed 44 inches above the floor.

Minimum net clear opening shall be 5.7 square feet; exception - grade level windows may have a minimum clear opening of 5 square feet.

Minimum net clear opening height shall be 24 inches.

Minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches.

Egress Window Wells

Egress window wells are required where the bottom of the egress window is below ground level.

The egress well must not interfere with the egress window fully opening.

The distance from the egress window to the back of the Egress well must be at least 36"

The minimum area of the egress well must be 9 square feet. (width x projection)

Egress Ladders and/or Steps

Egress ladders and or steps are required on window wells deeper than 44" and must be permanently attached.

An egress ladder or step may encroach into well up to 6".

Steps and/or distance between rungs of the ladder can't exceed 18".

The rungs of an egress ladder must be 12" wide or greater and must project a minimum of 3" away from the back wall, but can't exceed 6" from the back of the wall.

Egress Well Cover and/or Well Grates

Shall be easily opened or removed from the inside of the egress well without special tools.

These requirements are intended to make sure an average, able bodied person, would be able to both fit through and lift themselves up, and out the window. Please keep in mind whom may be using the living space in your basement and adjust these requirements as you feel necessary. The law only dictates the minimum required by law and may not be what best suits your needs. Use your common sense when picking the egress window size and egress window well size that you feel is right for you and your family. Keep safety in mind.

See your local building inspector with questions regarding code requirements in your area

Source: Residential Building Codes Egress Requirements By Lance Cunningham, Special Projects Manager, Architectural Testing, Inc., ICC: *The International Residential Code/ or One and Two Family Dwellings*, Chapter 3, Section R310 (2000)

For additional information, or to schedule an inspection, please call Jeff @ (608) 434-0790

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