

# Building Standards Advisory

Promoting construction of safe, healthy, habitable buildings

## Secondary Suites

### Question

“How does the National Building Code (NBC) apply to *secondary suites*?”

### Answer

The NBC recognizes *secondary suites* as a component that can be developed in a house and details the requirements an owner must comply with to ensure the *secondary suite* is safe, healthy, and habitable.

### Background

Home owners have been developing rental spaces in their houses for generations. However, earlier building codes did not recognize them unless all the requirements that applied to two-unit dwellings were applied.

With adoption of the NBC 2010 effective May 1, 2013, a *secondary suite*, as a component of a single-family dwelling, was formally recognized with a number of new provisions that are less stringent than the requirements in earlier editions of the NBC.

### Secondary Suite

A *secondary suite* is a self-contained *dwelling unit* of a prescribed maximum total *floor area* that is part of a building containing not more than two *dwelling units* including a principal suite, a *secondary suite*, and any common spaces such as storage, service rooms, laundry facilities, or *exits*. *Secondary suites* are typically created within an existing single dwelling or house either constructed as an addition to an existing house or incorporated within the existing *building*. A *secondary suite* may have more than one *storey* and may be above, below, or on the same *storey* as the principal suite.

Examples of *buildings* where *secondary suites* are permitted include individual detached houses or where the *secondary suite* is located in a portion of a *building*, semi-detached houses, free hold row houses, and townhouses. Excluded would be apartment *buildings* having more than two *dwelling units*.

Neither the principal suite nor secondary can be strata-titled or otherwise subdivided from the remainder of the house as per provincial legislation. Strata-titled means that a portion of a *building* is individually owned. With a principle and *secondary suite*, both would be registered under the same title and owned by a single owner.

In order to determine whether a *secondary suite* can be constructed in a home, the NBC 2010 prescribes a maximum size ratio between the principle suite and *secondary suite* in Division B, Article 9.1.2.1. This limits the *floor area* of a *secondary suite* to either:

- 1) 80 m<sup>2</sup>; or
- 2) 80% of the total *floor area* of all *storeys* of the principal suite, excluding the garage *floor area* and ancillary spaces serving both the *dwelling unit* and *secondary suite*.

## Secondary Suites

In contrast with previous editions of the National Building Code of Canada, the NBC 2010 allows relaxation of a number of provisions in the design and construction of *secondary suites*. The most significant is the relaxation from a fire separation to a smoke-tight barrier. A smoke-tight barrier can be achieved with the installation of 12.7 mm (1/2") drywall on walls and ceilings. The door leading into the *secondary suite* should be no less than a solid core, a minimum 45 mm thick and equipped with a self-closing device.

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.

Other provisions an owner must be aware of includes:

- bedroom windows in both principal and *secondary suites* must meet minimum requirements for emergency purposes.
- the principal and *secondary suite* must each have an independent source of heat with no interconnection of heating systems.
- Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms must be interconnected between the principal and *secondary suites*.

The following checklist, references the NBC 2010 requirements for the design and construction of *secondary suites*.

**The NBC 2010 Division B, Part 9 Secondary Suite Checklist**

NBC 2010 Article	Design Description	Design Requirements	v
9.1.2.1.	Limits on Floor Area of	Secondary suite size based based on dwelling	
9.5.3.1.	Ceiling Height	Not less than 1.95 m & not less than 1.85 m under beams and ducting	
9.5.5.1.	Doorway Sizes	Not less than 1890 mm	
9.8.2.1.	Stairway Width	Not less than 860 mm	
9.8.2.2.	Height Over Stairs	Not less than 1950 mm	
9.8.5.2.	Ramp Width	Not less than 860 mm	
9.8.5.3.	Height Over Ramp	Not less than 1950 mm	
9.8.9.1.	Loads – Stairs/Ramps	1.9 kPa	
9.8.9.4.	Stair Stringer Spacing	Not more than 900 mm o.c.	
9.9.4.2.	Fire Separation for Exits	Smoke-tight barrier and not less than 12.7 mm drywall	
9.9.10.1.	Egress from Bedrooms	Windows designed for egress	
9.10.8.3.	Wall, Columns, Aches, and Beam Protection	Not less than 12.7 mm drywall	
9.10.9.2.	Construction of Wall or Floors	Barrier against spread of smoke	
9.10.9.3.	Protection of Openings	Solid core door, 45 mm thick and self-closing	
9.10.9.14.	Separation of Units	Smoke-tight barrier, not less than 12.7 mm drywall	
9.10.10.4.	Furnace room	Smoke-tight barrier	
9.10.19.5.	Smoke Alarms	Interconnected with all smoke alarms in principle and secondary suite	
9.11.2.1.	Sound Transmission Rating	Minimum rating of 43	
9.32.1.2.	Ventilation	No interconnection between suites and not required in ancillary spaces	
9.32.3.9.	Carbon Monoxide Alarms	Interconnected with all CO detectors in principle and secondary suite and common spaces	
9.33.1.1.	Heating & Air Conditioning	Designed as per Section 9.33. and each suite with independent heating	
9.33.1.1.	Ducting	No interconnection between suites	
9.33.3.1.	Indoor Design Temperature	22° C – living spaces 18° C – ancillary spaces	

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This advisory is published by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Government Relations for purposes of providing information to users on the topic contained herein. In case of conflict between *The Uniform Building and Accessibility Standard Act* (the UBAS Act), the National Building Code of Canada 2010 (NBC 2010) and this advisory, provisions of the UBAS Act and NBC 2010 shall apply.