

EGRESS

What is an Egress Window?

The primary purpose for larger and or lower windows is to provide openings for fire fighter entry to obtain access in an emergency as well as provide an emergency means of exiting a dwelling.

Where are Egress Windows Required?

Egress windows are required in every room used for sleeping purposes (bedrooms) on any floor and in basements with habitable space. If you are constructing a new home, the code requires that you put an egress window in each bedroom. It also requires an egress window in the basement if habitable rooms will be finished in the basement. If you install a basement bedroom or bedrooms, an egress window is required in each bedroom. If you have an existing home and you add a sleeping room in an unfinished basement, the code requires that you install an egress window in the sleeping room or rooms.

What are the Size Requirements?

(Codes vary in Cities and States, check with your City Offices)

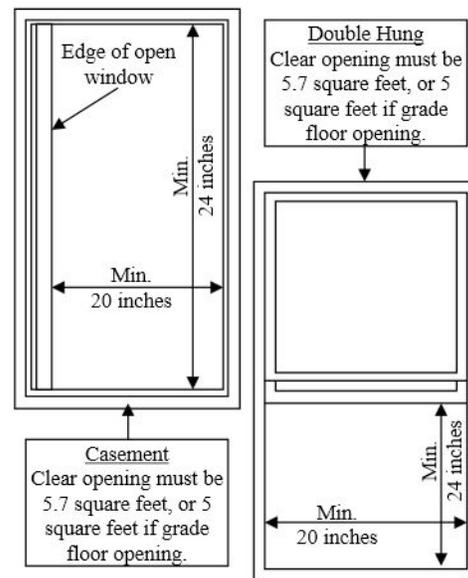
An egress window must satisfy four International Residential Code (IRC) criteria:

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

The window must have a minimum net clear opening of 5.7 sq. ft. Net clear opening 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 5.7 sq. 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.



Why Don't My Windows Meet 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 without the knowledge of inspectors and without the requisite egress window, they create a dangerous underground firetrap.

EGRESS (continued)

During remodeling, homeowners often unwittingly replace large egress windows with smaller, non-egress windows. And while the code will require egress windows 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:

- Allow the rescue window opening to be fully opened.
- Provide 9 sq. ft. of "floor area," with a minimum dimension of 36 in. in width and in length.
- 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.

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.