

Building Standards Advisory

Promoting construction of safe, healthy, habitable buildings

Requirements for Soffits

Question

“Do eaves require soffits or can they be left exposed?”

Answer

Eaves don't require the installation of soffits unless:

- exposed walls are not otherwise protected from precipitation;
- ventilation is not otherwise provided to the roof assembly; or
- the restrictive limiting distances of spatial separation require soffit protection installation or the eaves may need to be eliminated.

Background

Eaves on *buildings* have changed in architectural appearance. Open eaves with exposed rafter tails is a recognized architectural feature on many older *buildings* and are still used in new construction.

Specific to construction of single-family dwellings this advisory considers National Building Code 2010 (NBC 2010) requirements for soffits to prevent ingress of precipitation, allow for ventilation, and provide protection for spatial separation 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.

NBC 2010 Division B Article 9.27.1.1. General

This article states that where soffits are installed as cladding on wood-frame walls exposed to precipitation, the cladding assembly shall comply with NBC 2010 Division B Subsections 9.27.2. to 9.27.12., or Part 5. **Simplified, if another means of protection from precipitation for walls are not provided then soffits must be provided to protect walls.**

NBC 2010 Division B Article 9.19.1.1. Required Venting

This article states that except where it can be shown to be unnecessary, where insulation is installed between a ceiling and the underside of the roof sheathing, a space shall be provided between the insulation and the sheathing, and vents shall be installed to permit the transfer of moisture from the space to the exterior, providing not less than 1/300 of the insulated ceiling area. Where the roof slope is less than 1 in 6 or in roofs that are constructed with roof joists, the unobstructed vent area shall be not less than 1/150 of the insulated ceiling area. The requirement to vent a roof space may be attained through incorporating a variety of venting methods, such as roof type, eave type, gable-end type, or any combination distributed uniformly on opposite sides of the *building*, to provide not less than 25% of the required openings located at the top of the space, and not less than 25% of the required openings located at the bottom of the space. **Simplified, roof venting in compliance with NBC 2010 requirements may be attained without the use of venting at the eaves and the use of soffits.**

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NBC 2010 Division B Article 9.10.15.5. Construction of Exposing Building Face of Houses

This article requires that:

- where the *exposing building face* has a limiting distance of not more than 0.45 m, projecting roof soffits shall not be constructed above the *exposing building face*;
- where the *exposing building face* has a limiting distance of more than 0.45 m, the face of roof soffits above the *exposing building face* shall not project to less than 0.45 m from the property line; and
- where roof soffits project to less than 1.2 m from the property line, the centre line of a lane, or public thoroughfare or an imaginary line between two *buildings* or *fire compartments* on the same property, they shall have no openings and be protected.

Simplified, because of spatial separation and fire protection requirements, soffits may be required to limit the spread of fire into the roof assembly.

Where limiting distance provides adequate space between *buildings*, soffit protection may not be required.

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