

## Building Planning Codes for Egress Windows

IRC-2000 International Residential Code  
Emergency Escape & Rescue Opening Code  
Requirements for One & Two Family Dwellings

### - At A Glance -

#### **Windows Below Ground Level:**

Sill height of window above floor: Not to exceed 44"  
Minimum opening area: 5.7 sq. ft.  
Minimum opening height: 24"  
Minimum opening width: 20"

#### **Window Wells/Area Wells:**

Required where window opening sill height is below ground elevation.  
Horizontal dimensions: 9 sq.ft. (width x projection)  
Horizontal projection: 36"

#### **Ladders:**

Required on window wells deeper than 44" and must be permanently attached.  
Ladder may encroach into well up to 6".  
Step distance between rungs: 18"  
Rungs: 12" wide or greater and must project a minimum of 3" away from wall but maximum of 6".  
Grates: Shall be removable without special tools.

## **International Residential Code (IRC) 2000**

Code sponsored by: The International Code Council (ICC), the Building Officials Code Administration (BOCA), the Uniform Building Codes (UBC), and the Southern Building Code Congress International (SBCCI).

### **Emergency escape and rescue required: Section R310.1**

Basements with habitable space and every sleeping room shall have at least one operable emergency escape and rescue window or exterior door opening for emergency escape and rescue. Where openings are provided as a means of escape and rescue they shall have a sill height of not more than 44 inches (1118 mm) above the floor. Where a door opening having a threshold below the adjacent ground elevation serves as an emergency escape and rescue opening and is provided with a bulkhead enclosure, the bulkhead enclosure shall comply with Section R310.3. The net clear opening dimensions required by this section shall be obtained by the normal operation of the window or door opening from the inside. Escape and rescue window openings with a finished sill height below the adjacent ground elevation shall be provided with a window well in accordance with Section R310.2.

### **Minimum opening area: Section R310.1.1**

All emergency escape and rescue openings shall have a minimum net clear opening of 5.7 square feet (0.530 m<sup>2</sup>).  
Exception: Grade floor openings shall have a minimum net clear opening of 5 square feet (0.465 m<sup>2</sup>).  
Minimum opening height: Section R310.1.2 The minimum net clear opening height shall be 24 inches (610 mm).  
Minimum opening width: Section R310.1.3 The minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches (508 mm).  
Operational constraints: Section R310.1.4. Emergency escape and rescue openings shall be operational for the inside of the room without the use of keys or tools.

If you found this report helpful, please feel free to pass it along to your family, friends, or colleagues.

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**Natural Light: Section R303.1**

Habitable rooms shall be provided with natural light by means of exterior glazed opening with an area not less than (8%) of the floor area of such rooms with a min. of 10 sq.ft. with the deductions for the bathrooms, closets, halls, storage and utility space square footage. Sleeping rooms and habitable rooms shall be provided with natural ventilation by means of openable exterior openings with an area of not less than (4%) of the floor area of such rooms with a min. of 5 sq. ft.

**Window wells: Section R310.2**

Window wells required for emergency escape and rescue shall have horizontal dimensions that allow the door or window of the emergency escape and rescue opening to be fully opened. The horizontal dimensions of the window well shall provide a minimum net clear area of 9 square feet (0.84 m2) with a minimum horizontal projection and width of 36 inches (914 mm).

Exception. The ladder or steps required by Section R310.2.1 shall be permitted to encroach a maximum of 6 inches (152 mm) into the required dimensions of the window well.

**Ladder and steps: Section R310.2.1**

Window wells with a vertical depth greater than 44 inches (1118 mm) below the adjacent ground level shall be equipped with a permanently affixed ladder or steps usable with the window in the fully open position. Ladders or steps required by this section shall not be required to comply with R314 and R315. Ladders or rungs shall have an inside width of at least 12 inches (305 mm), shall project at least 3 inches (76 mm) from the wall and shall be spaced not more than 18 inches (457 mm) on center vertically for the full height of the window well.

**Bars, grills, covers and screens: Section R310.4**

Bars, grills, covers, screens or similar devices are permitted to be placed over emergency escape and rescue openings, bulkhead enclosures, or window wells that serve such openings, provided the minimum net clear opening size complies with Sections R310.1.1 to R310.1.3, and such devices shall be releasable or removable from the inside without the use of a key, tool or force greater than that which is required for normal operation of the escape and rescue opening.

