

BUILDING CODE REQUIREMENTS APPLYING TO RESIDENTIAL BASEMENTS

Often we hear questions, “Can I remodel my basement for a family room, playroom, bedroom, etc.?”

[1] If you can meet the ceiling height required by the 7th edition of the State Building Code. All ceiling heights for habitable basement space shall be a minimum of 7’ and no less than 6’6” under beams, duct work, and other ceiling projections.

[2] If you can meet the emergency egress from habitable space. The egress stairway must meet all the requirements of the 7th edition of the State Building Code. Basements with habitable space, and every sleeping room, shall have at least one openable window or exterior door approved for emergency egress or rescue.

Where basements contain one or more sleeping rooms, emergency egress and rescue openings shall be required in each sleeping room.

The units shall be operable from the inside to a full clear opening without the use of a key or tool. Emergency escape windows shall have a sill height of not more than 44 inches above the floor.

All emergency escape windows from sleeping rooms shall have a net clear opening of 3.3 square feet. The minimum net clear opening height shall be 24”. The minimum clear opening width shall be 20”.

Bars, grills and screens: Bars, grills, screens or other obstructions placed over emergency escape windows shall be reasonable or removable from the inside without the use of a key or tool.

[3] If I am adding another bedroom or sleeping area in the basement will I have to hardwire the smoke detectors in my entire house?

YES.

[4] Will the stairway leading to the basement have to have a minimum height?

YES – 6’6”.

[5] What should I use to frame this area?

All framing material which is on a concrete or masonry slab or less than 8” from exposed earth shall be of approved naturally durable or preservative-treated [p.t.] wood.

[6] Lighting and ventilation – what do I need to provide?

Every room or space intended for human occupancy shall be provided with natural or artificial light with two exceptions,

Exception #1: Every bathroom and toilet room shall, as a minimum, be provided with artificial light.

Exception #2: All interior and exterior stairways shall be provided with artificial light providing direct or indirect illumination and capable of illuminating the entire length of the stairway and associated landings. The control for activation of the required interior stairway lighting shall be accessible at the top and bottom of each stair without traversing any step of the stair and shall otherwise be installed in accordance with the requirements of 527 CMR 12.00 of the Massachusetts Electrical Code. The illumination of exterior stairs shall be controlled from inside the dwelling unit unless continuously illuminated or automatically activated.

Every room or space intended for human occupancy shall be provided with natural light or ventilation.

Exception: Every bathroom and toilet room shall be equipped with a mechanical exhaust fan and associated ductwork with the fan exhausting, as a minimum, 50 cfm if operated intermittently or 20 cfm if continuously operated. Such bathroom exhaust fan shall vent directly to the outside and no exhaust vent termination to attics or other interior portions of the building are allowed.

[7] What about insulation?

All insulation of conditioned space must comply with the 7th edition of the MA State Building Code.

[8] My boiler/furnace [fuel burning appliance] is in the basement, is that a problem?

Make-up-air for boilers/furnace must be provided as required by the MA Fuel and Gas Code. This determination will be made by the Plumbing & Gas Inspector.

[9] Do I need a building permit?

YES

[10] I have other questions – how do I get them answered?

Call the Building Inspector for Code interpretation.

Inspectors are in for office duty 11-12 noon and 3:00-4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. You may reach them by calling [781] 762-1240 extensions 202 & 205. If you wish to call at a time other than their office hours, you may leave a voice-mail.

This brochure provides general information for basement remodeling but does not cover all aspects of the State Building Code.

A contractor who is licensed as a Construction Supervisor and is a registered Home Improvement Contractor is always recommended.