

EMERGENCY ESCAPE AND RESCUE OPENINGS



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Thousands of fires occur in residences each year. Many of these fires occur at night when the occupants are asleep. Severe injuries or death can be the result of these fires if the occupants are asleep and unaware the fire is in progress.

In order to prevent the loss of life, the Minnesota State Building Code has emergency escape and rescue opening requirements for dwelling units. Sleeping rooms and basements are required to have windows or doors that may be used for emergency escape or rescue. The size of windows and doors required in the code are based on extensive research to determine the proper relationships of height and width of window openings to adequately serve for both rescue and escape. Rescuers need public access to a building and space to enter quickly wearing extra gear. Emergency escape and rescue openings shall open directly into a public way, or to a yard or court that opens to a public way, so the occupants may escape or be rescued directly from the room to the outside without having to travel through the building itself.

When a fire occurs, time is critical to survival. There may not be enough time to instruct family members and guests about the proper window operation or to perform complex operations to get the window open. The code requires windows and doors used for emergency escape or rescue to be readily openable without any special knowledge or effort. This means that no window sashes may be tilted or removed to obtain the required open area, width or height. Local building officials can be consulted to assist in the evaluation of special types of windows.

Emergency escape and rescue openings

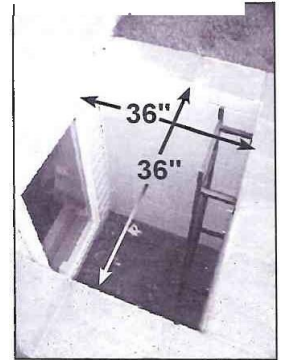
Basements and every sleeping room shall have at least one operable emergency and rescue opening. Such opening shall open directly into a public street, public alley, yard or court. Where basements contain one or more sleeping rooms, emergency egress and rescue openings shall be required in each sleeping room but shall not be required in adjoining areas of the basement. Where emergency escape and rescue openings are provided, they shall have a sill height of not more than 44 inches above the floor. Emergency escape and rescue openings shall open directly into a public way, or to a yard or court that opens to a public way. Basements used only to house mechanical equipment and not exceeding total floor area of 200 square feet do not need egress windows.

All emergency escape and rescue openings shall have a minimum net clear opening of 5.7 square feet except grade floor openings shall have a minimum net clear opening of 5 square feet. The net clear opening dimensions required by this section shall be obtained by the normal operation of the emergency escape and rescue opening from the inside. A window with an opening that meets the

minimum width and height will not necessarily meet the minimum required open area. The minimum net clear opening height shall be 24 inches and the minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches. Emergency escape and rescue openings shall be operational from the inside of the room without the use of keys, tools or special knowledge.

Emergency escape and rescue openings with a finished sill height below the adjacent ground elevation shall be provided with a window well. The minimum horizontal area of the window well shall be 9 square feet, with a minimum horizontal projection and width of 36 inches. The area of the window well shall allow the emergency escape and rescue opening to be fully opened.

Window wells with a vertical depth greater than 44 inches shall be equipped with a permanently affixed ladder or steps usable with the window in a fully open position. Ladders or rungs shall have an inside width of at least 12 inches on center and be spaced not more than 18 inches vertically for the full height of the window well. The ladder or steps shall be permitted to encroach a maximum of 3 inches into the required dimensions of the window well.



Bars, grilles, covers, screens or similar devices are permitted to be placed over emergency escape and rescue openings or window wells that serve such openings, provided the minimum net clear opening size complies with code requirements and such devices shall be releasable or removable from the inside without the use of a key, tool, special knowledge or force greater than that which is required for normal operation of the escape and rescue opening. Emergency escape windows are allowed to be installed under decks and porches provided the location of the deck allows the emergency escape window to be fully opened and provides a path not less than 36 inches in height to a yard or court.

Replacement windows installed in buildings meeting the scope of the International Residential Code shall be exempt from the requirements if the replacement window meets the following conditions:

1. The replacement window is the manufacturer's largest standard size window that will fit within the existing window frame or existing rough opening. The replacement window shall be permitted to be the same operating style as the existing window or a style that provides for a greater window opening area than the existing window.
2. The rooms or areas are not used for any Minnesota state licensed purpose, which includes additional requirements.

A special note regarding guards around windows

The Minnesota State Building Code does **not** specify requirements for guards around window wells to keep persons from falling into them, falls can and do occur. Because of the variations in the size, location and depth of window wells and since a guard could present an impediment to escape or rescue, the code is silent. The potential for falls into a window well should be evaluated by the homeowner and suitable guards or visual barriers provided based on the location, depth and size of the well. Barriers, guards or covers installed to prevent falls must be placed in such a way that does not impede use of the window well for escape and rescue. If covers are used, the effects of snow on the ability to open or remove them in an emergency must also be evaluated.

The ever-increasing concern for security, particularly in residential buildings has created a fairly large demand for security devices such as grilles, bars and steel shutters. Unless properly designed and constructed, these security devices over emergency windows can completely defeat the purpose of the emergency escape and rescue window. The code makes provisions for use of security devices, provided the release mechanism has been approved by the building official and it is operable from the inside without the use of a key or special knowledge. Fire deaths have been attributed to the inability of the individual to escape from the building because the security bars prevented emergency escape. Security devices should only be installed where absolutely necessary and only with a permit after an evaluation by your local building and fire official.