



## Policy A.01

### Emergency Escape and Rescue Openings

#### HISTORY

The requirement for emergency escape and rescue openings first appeared in the 1964 Uniform Building Code (UBC), which was adopted by the City of Anchorage on April 20, 1965. The requirement read as follows:

Every sleeping room below the fourth floor in Groups H and I Occupancies shall have at least one operable window or exterior door to permit emergency exit and rescue. Where windows are provided, they shall have a sill height of not more than 48 inches above the floor and shall provide not less than five square feet of operable area with no dimension less than 22 inches.

Group H and I Occupancies consisted of hotels, apartment houses, convents, monasteries, dwellings and lodging houses.

The basic emergency escape and rescue opening requirements in the UBC remained unchanged until the printing of the 1976 UBC where the minimum operable size increased to 5.7 square feet, the minimum operable height increased to 24 inches, the minimum width was reduced to 20 inches and the maximum allowable sill height was reduced to 44 inches. These dimensions, which are in effect today, were adjusted to help occupants escape and accommodate fire service personnel attempting to enter from a ladder while wearing full protective clothing and breathing apparatus.

Since the inception of emergency escape and rescue openings, the basic code requirements have been amended numerous times by the City of Anchorage, Borough, and later the MOA. These amendments are on file at the Clerk's office. One of the more prevalent amendments concerns the maximum allowable sill height. When the 1976 UBC was adopted, a local amendment was implemented to keep the maximum allowable sill height at 48 inches above the floor. This amendment remained in affect until the adoption of the 2000 International Building Code (IBC) on January 28, 2003, at which time the maximum allowable sill height became 44 inches. It should be noted that the UBC did not apply to detached one and two family dwelling units. They were regulated by the one and two family dwelling code known as the CABO. The 44 inch maximum allowable sill height requirement in the CABO was also amended to 48 inches. This amendment remained until the adoption of the 1992 CABO in May of 1995. The amendment for the 1992 CABO allowed a 48 inch maximum sill height on basement windows and windows serving sleeping rooms located below grade.

#### REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

The 2018 International Building Code, Section 1030, "Emergency Escape and Rescue", and the 2018 International Residential Code, Section R310, "Emergency Escape and Rescue Openings", state that basements in dwelling units and every sleeping room below the fourth story shall have at least one operable emergency escape and rescue window or exterior door for emergency escape and rescue. Such openings shall open directly into a public street, public alley, yard, or court.

Emergency escape or rescue windows shall have a minimum net clear opening area of 5.7 sq. ft., except grade-floor openings are permitted to have a minimum net clear opening of 5.0 sq. ft. This results from the increased ease of access from the exterior and the probability that a ladder will not be needed. The minimum net clear opening height shall be 24 inches and the minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches for all emergency escape and rescue windows.

Emergency escape and rescue windows shall have a sill height of not more than 44 inches measured from the finished floor to the bottom of the clear opening. Emergency escape and rescue openings located in the basement of a detached one or two family dwelling unit or townhouse (as defined in the IRC) may have a sill height of not more than 48 inches. The 48 inch maximum sill height allowance for basements is a local amendment to the IRC and does not apply to the IBC.

#### REQUIREMENTS FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS

As recently as January 2009, Anchorage realized a fire death that was substantially attributed to the lack of an adequate emergency escape and rescue window. Since emergency escape and rescue openings are considered a fire/life safety requirement, they shall be provided in accordance with the currently adopted codes.

Exceptions:

1. Emergency escape and rescue windows installed prior to 2004 shall have a maximum allowable sill height of not more than 48 inches above the floor.
2. Emergency escape and rescue windows located in buildings constructed prior to 1979 shall provide not less than five square feet of openable area. The minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches and the minimum net clear opening height shall be 22 inches.

Newly constructed emergency escape and rescue openings shall comply with the currently adopted IBC or IRC as applicable.

A single permanent step may be constructed in front of an existing emergency escape and rescue window serving a basement or sleeping room to meet the maximum allowable sill height specified above. The distance between the top of the step and the window clear opening shall not exceed 48 inches for basement windows and 44 inches for other windows. The maximum height and minimum depth of the step shall be 7-3/4 inches and 10 inches, respectively (in accordance with the IRC) regardless of type of residential occupancy. The width of the step shall be at least as wide as the window clear opening but need not exceed 36 inches.

Required emergency escape and rescue openings shall be maintained in accordance with the 2012 International Fire Code. The openings shall be operational from the inside of the room without the use of keys, tools, or special knowledge.

**CHANGE OF USE OR OCCUPANCY CLASSIFICATION**

New sleeping rooms created within existing buildings shall be provided with emergency escape and rescue openings in accordance with the currently adopted IRC or IBC, as applicable. The "single step" allowed for existing basements and sleeping rooms shall not be used to obtain sill height compliance.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Grade floor opening** – A window or other opening located such that the sill height of the opening is not more than 44 inches above or below the finished ground level adjacent to the opening (IBC/IRC).

**Emergency escape and rescue opening** – An operable window, door or other similar devices that provides for a means of escape and access for rescue in the event of an emergency (IBC/IRC).



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Robert Doehl, Building Official

Date: December 10, 2020

(Ref. 11-11, 97-02, 00-03, 04-01; 06-04; 09-01; 09-05; 16-06)

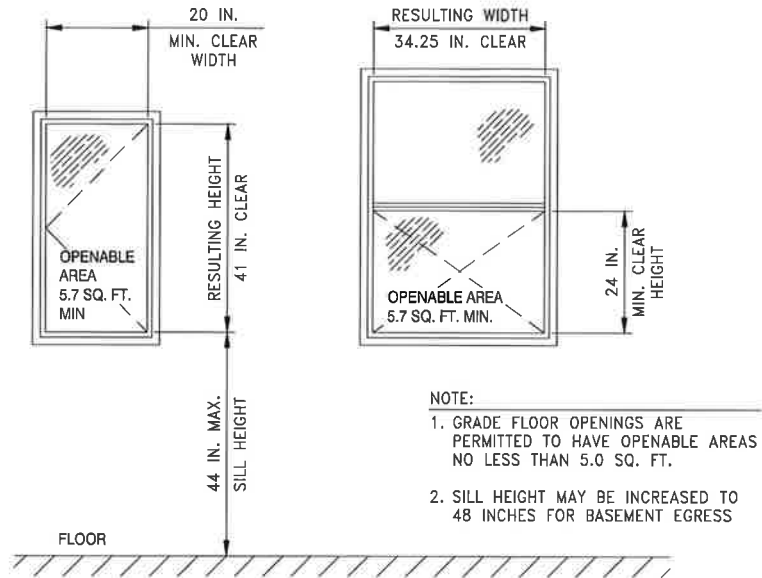


Figure R310.1  
EMERGENCY ESCAPE AND RESCUE WINDOW

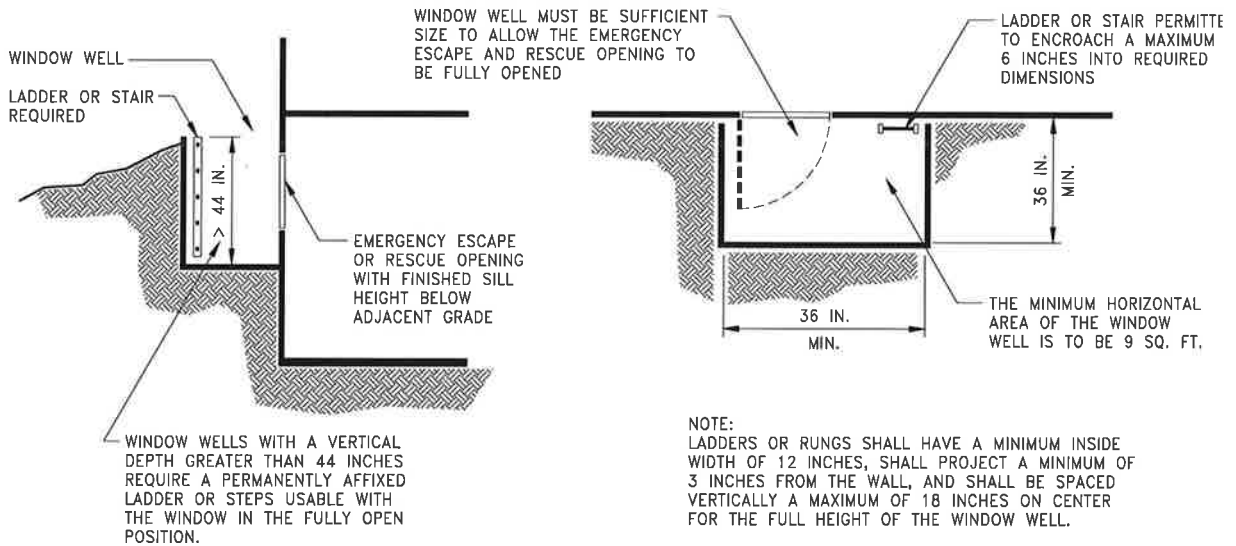


Figure R310.2  
WINDOW WELLS