

## Finishing Your Basement

### Alberta's Safety System

Alberta Municipal Affairs works in partnership with the Safety Codes Council, municipalities, corporations, agencies, and other organizations, to deliver effective community-focused public safety programs and services to Albertans.

### Do you need a permit?

Yes. You **must** obtain a building permit for any basement development as determined by your local authority. As the home owner, you are responsible for getting all necessary permit(s). Check with your municipality to find out what permits you need, or contact Municipal Affairs to find the permit provider in your area. Make sure you get your permit(s) before starting your project.

**IMPORTANT:** Check with your municipality on the zoning and development bylaws in your area. Some restrictions may apply.

### Basement suites

This brochure provides information about basement development for single-family homes only. It does **not** include the province-wide standards for the construction of secondary suites that are included in the current Alberta Building Code and Alberta Fire Code.

For more information on basement suite requirements, please refer to the **Secondary Suites** brochure or contact Alberta Municipal Affairs at 1-866-421-6929.

### Importance of permits

The *Safety Codes Act* requires that permits in Alberta be obtained prior to commencing work on any buildings covered by the Alberta Building and Fire Codes, the Canadian Electrical Code, the Gas Code, or the National Plumbing Code.

Permits are part of a process to access compliance to a minimum standard of construction safety for the benefit of all Albertans. If construction projects are undertaken without required permits, the owner may be subject to penalties and extra costs incurred to bring a project into compliance.

As the property owner, you are responsible to obtain all necessary permits. A contractor can look after this on your behalf; however, you should specify in writing, who will get the required permits. Some jurisdictions may require a letter of authorization before a contractor can apply for permit(s) on your behalf.

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### Required plans information

Before starting any construction, you must submit plans with your building permit application to your municipality or permit provider. The plans may include any combination or all of the following:

- site plan
- foundation (basement) plan
- floor plans
- elevations
- cross-section

### Floor plan *(required information)*

- Indicate the use and sizes of rooms and spaces.
- Use proper dimensions.
- Provide floor layout and construction details.
- Show window and door opening locations and sizes.
- Include details of all structural elements.

**Insulation:** The perimeter of the foundation wall is to be fully insulated. This insulation is to have a minimum effective thermal resistance as applicable to the location of your home in Alberta.

#### Foamed plastic insulation materials:

These can produce toxic gases when exposed to fire and must be protected by a thermal barrier (i.e., drywall).

**Vapour Barrier:** Must be installed on the heated side of the insulation.

### Egress (Exit) windows from bedrooms

Unless a bedroom has a door that leads directly to the building exterior or the building has a firesprinkler system, each bedroom must have at least one window that can be opened from the inside without the use of tools or technical knowledge.

This window must provide an unobstructed opening with a minimum area of 0.35 m<sup>2</sup> (3.77 ft<sup>2</sup> or 543 in<sup>2</sup>), with no dimension less than 380 mm (15"). See the drawings examples below for further clarification.

### Benefits of getting a permit

When you get a permit, certified safety codes officers (inspectors) will:

- give you expert advice,
- review your plans to find any potential problems,
- inspect your project, and
- make sure your project meets the Alberta Building Code.

Making changes at the planning stage can save you money, rather than making costly corrections after construction. Certified safety codes officers will give you an inspection report(s) and follow-up on deficiencies to make sure your project is safe and in compliance.

### Where do you get a permit?

Permits are available through municipalities that administer the *Safety Codes Act* and through agencies that provide inspection services on behalf of municipalities or the province. If you don't know whether your municipality issues permits, contact the Alberta Safety Codes Authority (ASCA) at 1-888-413-0099 or visit [safetycodes.ab.ca/ASCA](http://safetycodes.ab.ca/ASCA).

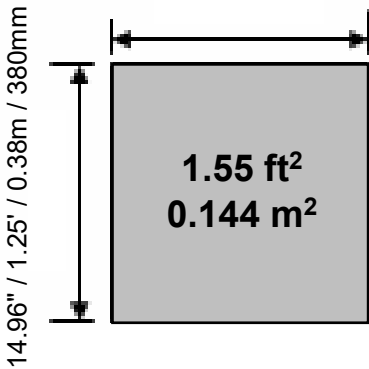
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## Examples of conforming and non-conforming bedroom windows

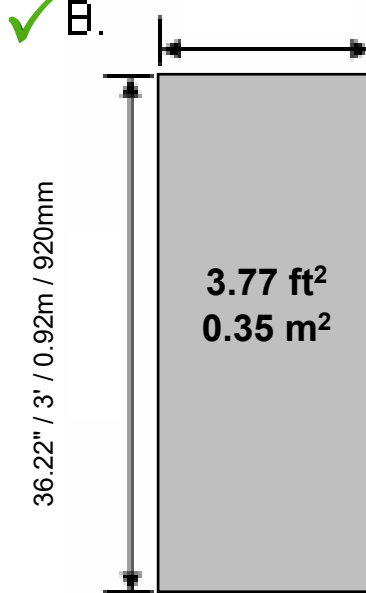
The opening in example A is only 0.144 m<sup>2</sup>(1.6m<sup>2</sup>), and will not allow the average occupant to pass through the window as an alternate means of escape during a fire emergency.

**X A. Does not conform to area requirements**

14.96" / 1.25' / 0.38m / 380mm

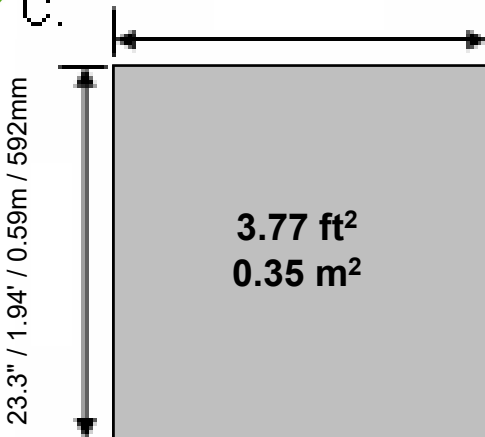


✓ B. 14.96" / 1.25' / 0.38m / 380mm



✓ C.

23.3" / 1.94' / 0.59m / 592mm



Examples B and C conform to height, width and area requirements.

### Applying for a building permit

When applying for a building permit, you must submit the following information to your local authority:

- details of the project or occupancy to be covered by the permit.
- details of the land on which the project will be located, including a description that will easily identify and locate the building lot.
- plans, specifications and other documents showing, in detail, the proposed occupancy of all parts of the building, state the value of the proposed project.
- state the names, addresses and phone numbers of the project owner, designer and contractor.

### Hire qualified tradespeople

Specific trades such as electricians, plumbers and gasfitters must be certified to work in Alberta. To find out if the tradespeople you are hiring need to be certified in Alberta or to verify an individual's status, you may contact *The Apprenticeship and Industry Training* office by calling 310-0000.

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### Window egress into window-well

If a window opens into a window-well, a clearance of at least 760 mm (30") between the window and the wall of the window-well is required.

An awning-style window may pose a challenge in maintaining this clearance, and it could interfere with the occupant's ability to exit through the window-well. The required clearances **must** be maintained when the window is in the open position.

### Fuel-fired heating appliances

In developed basements, fuel-fired heating appliances and water heaters must be enclosed in a separate room from the living space.

### Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms conforming to *CAN/ULC-S531 "Smoke Alarms"* must be located in both the main dwelling and the basement and must be installed in conformance of *CAN/ULC-S553 "Installation of Smoke-Alarms"* and the Alberta Building Code. Sleeping rooms are required to have smoke alarms installed in each room. The smoke alarms must be hard-wired into an electrical circuit and interconnected so they will all operate in unison.

*(Please also see Alberta Municipal Affairs Smoke Alarm Home Installation Brochure.)*

### Carbon monoxide alarms

Carbon monoxide alarms conforming to *CAN/CSA-6.19 "Residential Carbon Monoxide Alarming Devices"* must be installed in every new home built since Sept 2007 which contain a solid-fuel burning appliance or storage garage in conformance with the current Alberta Building Code. They are also recommended for existing homes.




*(Please also see Alberta Municipal Affairs [Carbon Monoxide Alarm Home Installation Brochure](#).)*

*These brochures may be updated periodically. They have no legal status and cannot be used as an official interpretation of the various bylaws, codes and regulations currently in effect.*

#### More information:




##### Alberta Municipal Affairs

Community & Technical Support  
16<sup>th</sup> Floor, Commerce Place  
10155 - 102 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L4



 Toll-free: 1-866-421-6929  
 [safety.services@gov.ab.ca](mailto:safety.services@gov.ab.ca)  
 [municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca](http://municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca)

##### Safety Codes Council

Suite 500  
10405 Jasper Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3N4

 Toll-free within Alberta:  
1-888-413-0099  
1-888-424-5134  
 [webmaster@safetycodes.ab.ca](mailto:webmaster@safetycodes.ab.ca)  
 [safetycodes.ab.ca](http://safetycodes.ab.ca)

##### Alberta Safety Codes Authority (ASCA)

 Toll-free within Alberta:  
1-888-413-0099  
 [askasca@safetycodes.ab.ca](mailto:askasca@safetycodes.ab.ca)

#### Call (or click) before you dig!

**Alberta One Call** will locate utility lines on your property. Call or click before you start any project that involves digging in your yard. Alberta One Call will locate gas, water, electricity, drainage, telephone and cable TV lines. Allow at least two full working days for Alberta One Call to locate your utility lines.