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Basement Emergency Escape and Rescue Openings

“Providing for Michigan’s Safety in the Built Environment”

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BASEMENT EMERGENCY ESCAPE AND RESCUE OPENINGS

Issue

The Michigan Residential Code (MRC) requires that basements with habitable space and every sleeping room have at least one openable emergency escape window or exterior door opening for emergency escape and rescue. Two questions have been raised regarding the application of this code requirement:

1. When does a basement without a bedroom require an egress window?
2. If a basement contains a bedroom and a separate habitable space such as a recreation room, are emergency escape and rescue windows or exterior door openings required from each space?

Code

R310.1 of the MRC sets forth the provisions when emergency escape and rescue openings are required in the following areas:

1. Basements with habitable space.
2. Every sleeping room.

Section R201.1, provides for the applicability of definitions: *“Unless otherwise expressly stated, the following words and terms shall, for the purposes of this code, have the meanings indicated in this chapter.”*

Section R202, defines a habitable space as *“A space in a building for living, sleeping, eating or cooking. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces and similar areas are not considered habitable spaces.”*

Conclusion

Section R201.1 of the code makes it clear that the only definition of habitable space applicable in one- and two-family dwellings is found in the MRC. Habitable space is defined as a space in a building for living, sleeping, eating or cooking. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces and similar areas are not considered habitable spaces. Section R303 of the MRC sets forth specific light, ventilation and heating requirements for habitable rooms. Section R305.1 provides the minimum ceiling height for habitable rooms. If a basement contains room or spaces meeting the requirements for habitability, an emergency escape and rescue window or exterior door would be required. Conversely, a basement designated and only containing storage, toilet, and utility spaces in accordance with R106.1.1 of the code, would not require an emergency and rescue window or exterior door.

If a basement contains a bedroom and a separate habitable space, such as a recreation room, section R310.1 of the code would require at least one emergency escape and rescue window or exterior door from each space.

When a habitable basement contains a sleeping room and a separate habitable space, one window may be provided in the sleeping room when access to the sleeping room is not subject to locking. Reliance upon an egress passageway through an adjacent bedroom subject to locking would not meet the intent of the code for egress from a room or space.

Questions regarding this technical bulletin may be directed to the Michigan Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth, Bureau of Construction Codes, Building Division, P.O. Box 30254, Lansing, MI 48909 or by calling (517) 241-9317.