

City of West Allis Department of Building Inspection & Neighborhood Services
Informational Bulletin

Basement Remodeling

BINS 2/2016

for One and Two Family Dwellings

Basic Code Requirements

All new construction, materials, equipment, appliances and elements shall meet the requirements of the Wisconsin Uniform Dwelling Code (UDC). The UDC may be purchased by calling Wisconsin Department of Administration Document Sales & Distribution at (608) 266-3358

The UDC may also be viewed online at the following link:
<http://dsps.wi.gov/programs/industry-services>

Zoning Requirements - Parking

- A one and two family home must have enough paved off street parking spaces for 2 vehicles, plus one additional space for every bedroom over three.

Stairway and Guardrail Requirements

- New, remodeled and existing stairways must meet the requirements for new construction under the UDC.
- Existing stairways in dwellings originally constructed prior to June 1, 1980 may vary these requirements when approved by the building inspector.

Exiting Requirements

- Basements with no sleeping areas require one means of egress. This is typically accomplished with one interior stairway.
- Basements used for sleeping require two means of egress.
 - Enclosed rooms with a closet are considered bedrooms regardless of the intended original use of the room, due to their future potential as a bedroom.
- For a basement with a sleeping area, the typical interior stairway to the first floor counts as one exit. The second exit must be another interior stairway, an exterior door, or an egress window located in each bedroom or sleeping area. Windows used for exiting must meet the requirements of the UDC. (See *Informational Bulletin for Egress Windows*.)

Ceiling Height Requirements

- All habitable rooms, kitchens, hallways, bathrooms, and corridors must have a ceiling height of at least 7 feet. Rooms may have reduced ceiling height provided that

at least 50% of the room's floor area has at least 7 foot ceiling height. Any area with a ceiling height less than 5 feet is not considered floor area when calculating ceiling height.

- Beams and girders or other projections such as ductwork or piping may not project more than 8 inches below the required ceiling height.
- Dwellings originally constructed prior to June 1, 1980 may vary these requirements when approved by the building inspector.

Natural Light and Ventilation Requirements

- Bedrooms in the basement must have natural light by means of windows of at least 8% of the net floor area.
- Bedrooms in the basement must also be provided with natural ventilation by means of openable windows of at least 3.5% of the net floor area of the room, or by balanced mechanical ventilation, provided the system is capable of providing at least one air change per hour of fresh outside air.
- Net floor area does not include any floor area with a ceiling height less than 5 feet.

Mechanical Ventilation Requirements

- Distribution systems must be designed to satisfy the heating of each conditioned space.
- Habitable rooms without natural ventilation must be provided with a balanced mechanical ventilation system providing one air change of fresh outside air when the room is occupied.
- Rooms with toilets, tubs or showers must be provided with exhaust ventilation capable of exhausting 50 c.f.m. intermittently or 20 c.f.m. continuously. All exhaust must terminate outside the dwelling.
- Existing heating and cooling appliances should be evaluated to determine if they can accommodate the additional load of the basement.
- Combustion air requirements must be maintained for mechanical room or area. Refer to the manufacturers instructions and/or UDC,SPS 323.06. The most restrictive requirements apply.

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Miscellaneous Requirements

- **Smoke Alarms.** A listed and labeled multiple-station smoke alarm with battery back-up must be installed inside and outside of each sleeping room and in common areas on floors that do not contain sleeping rooms. They must be continuously powered by the house electrical service, and must be interconnected so that the activation of one alarm will cause activation of all alarms.
- **Carbon Monoxide Alarms.** A listed carbon monoxide alarm with battery back-up must be installed in the basement, outside of each sleeping room and in common areas on floors that do not contain sleeping rooms. They are not required in the attic, garage or storage rooms. They must be continuously powered by the house electrical service, and must be interconnected so that the activation of one alarm will cause activation of all alarms. This section does not apply to a dwelling that has no attached garage, no fireplace and no fuel-burning appliance.
 - Battery operated smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms may be permitted if alterations do include removal of wall and/or ceiling finishes. The Building Inspector shall make the final determination in these cases.
- **Crawl Space Requirements**
 - Unheated crawl spaces must be provided with ventilation. The area of ventilation must be at least 1/1500 of the floor space, and at least 50% of the ventilating area must be located on opposite ends of the crawl space or as far away as possible.
 - Floors above unheated crawl spaces must be insulated to a minimum of R-19.
 - Crawlspace with 18" of clearance or more must be provided with an access opening of at least 14 inches by 24 inches.
- **Access Panels.** Access panels and clearance for maintenance must be provided when enclosing water meters, plumbing clean-outs and water shut-offs.

Permit Requirements

- **Building Permit.** In order to obtain a building permit, the applicant must possess a Dwelling Contractor Certification (DC) and a Dwelling Contractor Qualifier Certification (DCQ). The DCQ may be in the name of a current employee.
 - The owner of a dwelling may obtain a building permit if they reside in the dwelling or intend to reside in the dwelling upon completion of alterations.

- **HVAC Permit.** The replacement or installation heating or cooling appliances is required to be done by a registered HVAC contractor that has obtained a permit from this department.
 - The owner of a dwelling may obtain an HVAC permit if they reside in the dwelling or intend to reside in the dwelling upon completion of alterations.
 - An owner may service existing heating, ventilating, air conditioning equipment in properties owned by the person, regardless of where they reside. No permit is required.
 - Ductwork extension to remodeled areas is included under the scope of the Building Permit.
- **Plumbing and Electrical Permits.** Only licensed plumbing and electrical contractors may obtain permits and perform plumbing or electrical work.

Plan Submittal

- An application for building permit must be accompanied by three sets of scaled plans, specifications, engineering details, and other information as required to provide sufficient detail for review in the issuance of a permit. Basic information should include the following:
 - An existing floor plan of the basement showing current use of each room or space.
 - A proposed floor plan, indicating framing details, area dimensions and use, room finishes of walls and ceilings, door and window sizes, egress window details, location of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and location of plumbing fixtures. Plans should also show location of heat registers and exhaust fans providing mechanical ventilation.
 - Any other information pertinent to the remodeling. Insufficient information may delay permit submittal.

This informational bulletin is not intended to be a design manual. It is intended to highlight some of the basic construction and life safety issues that will be required to be addressed in your remodeling project. For further information, please contact the Department of Building Inspections and Neighborhood Services at (414)302-8400.

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