

## Residential Building Codes Egress Requirements

By Lance Cunningham, Special Projects Manager, Architectural Testing, Inc.

The building codes define “means of egress” and an exit system that provides a continuous, unobstructed and undiminished path of exit travel from any occupied point in a building or structure to a public way. Means of egress are required by the building codes to provide a point of emergency escape and rescue. The codes require at least one emergency escape and rescue opening in every sleeping room and basement with habitable space. This is typical of buildings not exceeding four floors in height. Means of egress for residential windows, as defined in the major building codes, address issues relative to minimum clear opening dimensions, height of the window sill and operation of the window. To facilitate emergency egress, building codes state that windows used as a means of egress be operable from the inside without the use of separate tools or keys.

Following is an outline of the specific egress requirements of the major US building codes:

### **BOCA: *The National Building Code, Chapter 10, Section 1010.4 (1999)***

Sill height shall not exceed 44 inches above the floor.

Minimum net clear opening shall be 5.7 square feet; exception – grade level windows may have a minimum clear opening of 5 square feet.

Minimum net clear opening height shall be 24 inches.

Minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches.

### **ICBO: *The Uniform Building Code, Chapter 3, Section 310.4 (1999)***

Sill height shall not exceed 44 inches above the floor.

Minimum net clear opening shall be 5.7 square feet; exception – grade level windows may have a minimum clear opening of 5 square feet.

Minimum net clear opening height shall be 24 inches.

Minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches.

### **CABO: *The One and Two Family Dwelling Code, Chapter 3, Section 310 (1995)***

Sill height shall not exceed 44 inches above the floor.

Minimum net clear opening shall be 5.7 square feet; exception – grade level windows may have a minimum clear opening of 5 square feet.

Minimum net clear opening height shall be 22 inches.

Minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches.

### **SBCCI: *The Standard Building Code, Chapter 10, Section 1005.4 (1999)***

Sill height shall not exceed 44 inches above the floor.

Minimum net clear opening shall be 5.7 square feet; exception – grade level windows may have a minimum clear opening of 5 square feet.

Minimum net clear opening height shall be 24 inches.

Minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches.

**ICC: *The International Residential Code for One and Two Family Dwellings*,  
Chapter 3, Section R310 (2000)**

Sill height shall not exceed 44 inches above the floor.

Minimum net clear opening shall be 5.7 square feet; exception – grade level windows may have a minimum clear opening of 5 square feet.

Minimum net clear opening height shall be 24 inches.

Minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches.

**FBC: *Florida Building Code 2001*, Chapter 10, Section 1005.4 (2001)**

Sill height shall not exceed 44 inches above the floor.

Minimum net clear opening shall be 5.7 square feet; exception – grade level windows may have a minimum clear opening of 5 square feet.

Minimum net clear opening height shall be 24 inches.

Minimum net clear opening width shall be 20 inches.

The requirements outlined above for the major US building codes can be modified by local jurisdictions. Therefore, it is important to check local codes in the areas in which the product is to be installed.