



Town of Riverdale Park, Maryland

Office of Development Services

Standards for Egress Windows in Residential Dwellings

The **International Residential Code**, as adopted in the **Subtitle 4 of the Prince George's County Code**, requires residential dwellings to have a primary and secondary means of escape in the living and sleeping areas.

1. What is a Primary Means of Escape?

Primary means of escape is a door, stairway, or ramp that provide a clear, direct passageway to the outside of the dwelling at the street or ground level. One of these items is usually in a dwelling for entering and leaving the premises.

2. What is a Secondary Means of Escape?

Secondary means of escape is a window or door that meet the following conditions:

- Openable from the inside “without the use of tools, keys, or special effort”
- A **clear opening** of 5 square feet for windows at or below grade (5.7 square feet if above grade)
- Window must have a minimum width of 20 inches and a minimum height of 24 inches
- Bottom of the window sill must not exceed 44 inches above the floor.

Illustration 1: Adequate vs. Inadequate Egress Window

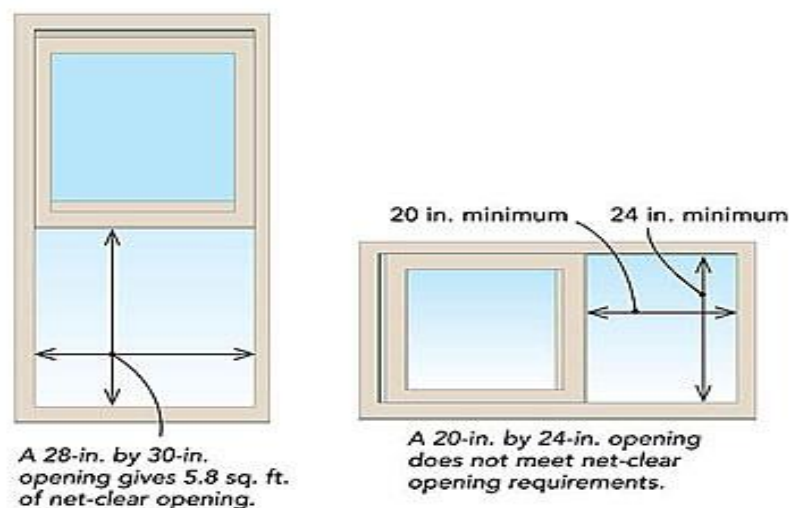


Table 1: Width-to-Height Requirements for Egress Window at or Below Grade (5.0 Sq. Ft.)

W	20	20.5	21	21.5	22	22.5	23	23.5	24	24.5	25	25.5	26	26.5	27	27.5	28	28.5	29	29.5	30
H	36	35.5	34.5	33.5	33	32	31.5	31	30	29.5	29	28.5	28	27.5	27	26.5	26	25.5	25	24.5	24

Table 2: Width-to-Height Requirements for Egress Window Above Grade (5.7 Sq. Ft.)

W	20	20.5	21	21.5	22	22.5	23	23.5	24	24.5	25	25.5	26	26.5	27	27.5	28	28.5	29	29.5	30
H	41	40	39.5	38.5	37.5	36.5	36	35	34.5	33.5	33	32.5	32	31	30.5	30	29.5	29	28.5	28	27.5

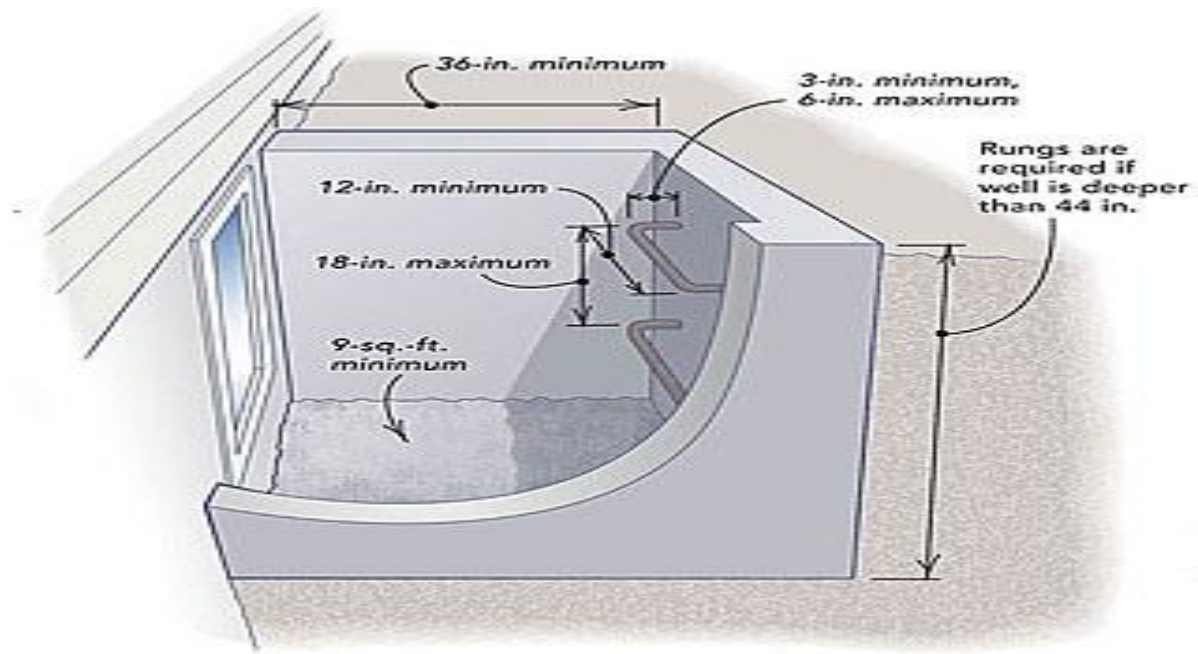
Source: *Code Check*, 8th Edition (2017), p. 11

3. When is a window well required?

A window well is required for windows below grade, and must meet the following conditions:

- Contain enough space to fully open the window.
- The well is no less than 9 square feet, and the length and width no less than 36 inches.
- If the well is deeper than 44 inches, it must have a ladder or rungs/steps that do not obstruct the window, nor extend more than 6 inches into the well.

Illustration 2: Window Well



Drawings: Dan Thornton

Source: *Fine Homebuilding* (2004), p. 104

4. What is the purpose for secondary means of escape and egress windows?

A fire in a residential dwelling could block the primary means of escape (i.e. basement door directly to the outside). The secondary means of escape provides an alternate route to reduce the risk of a person becoming trapped by the fire.

The width and height dimensions for egress windows are necessary for occupants to exit the premises during a fire and allow a fully-equipped fire fighter to enter for search and rescue purposes.

Notes:

- 1. **Any alteration(s) to an existing window and / or the installation of a window well requires building permits from Prince George's County and the Town of Riverdale Park.***
- 2. **It is recommended that a licensed and qualified fire safety professional is consulted for any of the above referenced work.***

For more information, please contact the Town of Riverdale Park Office of Development Services at (301) 927-6381.

Thank you for your investment and for growing with us!