

**Oregon**  
**Interpretive Ruling No. 93-31**  
**WINDOW WELLS AS BASEMENT BEDROOM EGRESS WINDOWS**  
**IN ONE- AND TWO-FAMILY DWELLINGS AND APARTMENTS**

**Requested By: PPPI MANUAL REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**QUESTION**

Are window wells permitted around the required egress windows from bedrooms located in basements in one and two family dwellings and apartments?

**APPLICABLE CODE SECTIONS**

**1993 One and Two Family Dwelling Specialty Code (Dwelling Code).**

**Section R-210.2:** Every sleeping room shall have at least one operable window or exterior door approved for emergency egress or rescue. The units must be operable from the inside to a full, clear opening without the use of separate tools. Where windows are provided as a means of egress or rescue they shall have a sill height of not more than 44 inches above the floor.

All egress or rescue windows from sleeping rooms must have a minimum net clear opening of 5.7 square feet. The minimum net clear opening height dimension shall be 24 inches. The minimum net clear opening width dimension shall be 20 inches.

**Exception:** Grade floor window may have a minimum net clear opening of 5 square feet.

**Section R-118: GRADE FLOOR WINDOW.** A window located such that the sill height of the window is not more than 44 inches above or below the finished grade adjacent to the window.

**Structural Specialty Code Section 1204 says in part:**

Basements in dwelling units and every sleeping room below the fourth story shall have at least one operable window or door approved for emergency escape or rescue which shall open directly into a public street, public alley, yard or exit court. The units shall be operable from the inside to provide a full clear opening without the use of separate tools.

All escape or rescue windows shall have a minimum net clear openable area of 5.7 square feet. The minimum net clear openable height dimension shall be 24 inches. the minimum net clear openable width dimension shall be 20 inches. When windows are provided as a means of escape or rescue they shall have a finished sill height not more than 44 inches above the floor.

**BACKGROUND**

The intent of the code is to allow people to escape from a bedroom and/or fire department personnel to enter in an emergency. Since a yard or court may be three feet wide, it is logical a window well may be used, if it meets certain safety criteria.

Reference: SCAB 3/24/81. Originally Approved by: Jane F. Huston, Director of Commerce.

**FINDINGS**

This interpretation is authorized by ORS 455.060, Rulings on Acceptability of Materials, Designs or Methods of Construction and Attorney General's Opinion OP-5208 issued October 1, 1981, advising the statute permits authoritative interpretations of existing code requirements.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The board rules window wells may be used around basement emergency egress windows in one- and two-family dwellings and apartments when:

1. The window well does not encroach on adjacent property and the plan dimensions of window well are at least 3 feet long, 3 feet wide and the total depth of the well is no greater than 44 inches below outside grade or below the window sill height; and

2. Windows have a minimum net clear opening of 5 square feet for one- and two-family dwellings and 5.7 square feet for apartment units; and
3. Window wells are provided with the means for draining rain/storm water.

Interpretive Ruling 93-31 replaces PPPI-4084.

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(signed September 28, 1993)

John Talbott, Chairman  
Structural Code Advisory Board

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Date

The recommendations and findings of the Structural Code Advisory Board are accepted and adopted.

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(signed October 1, 1993)

Gary J. Wicks, Administrator  
Building Codes Agency

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Date