



TOWN OF **HORSEHEADS** NEW YORK

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Finishing Basements: What You Need To Know

- New York has building code requirements for detached one and two-family dwellings and townhouses not more than 3 stories in height, all of which are included in the new Residential Code of New York State. **This applies to all new residential construction in New York, including, for example, converting a basement space into habitable (for living, eating, sleeping or cooking) space.**
- To be able to convert a basement space into habitable space, there are several requirements that have to be met. For example, habitable rooms must have a ceiling height of not less than 7 feet from the finished floor. Beams and girders spaced not less than 4 feet on center may project not more than 6 inches below required ceiling height
- Light and ventilation need to be supplied to all habitable rooms by providing an aggregate glazing area (windows) of not less than 8% of the floor area for light, and not less than 4% of the floor area for a minimum openable area to the outdoors for ventilation.
- Basements with habitable space and every sleeping room need to have at least one openable emergency escape and rescue opening. The opening shall have a sill height of not more than 44 inches above the floor, and have a minimum net clear opening of 5.7 square feet. The opening must be at least 20 inches wide and 24 inches high, and operational from the inside without the use of keys or tools.
- It is also possible to use window wells for emergency egress. The horizontal dimension of the window well must provide a net clear area of at least 9 square feet, and must have a minimum horizontal projection of at least 36 inches. If the window well has a greater vertical depth than 44 inches, then it must be equipped with a permanently affixed ladder or steps usable with the window in the fully open position.
- Emergency escape windows underdecks and porches are allowed provided the emergency escape window can fully open and provide a path of not less than 36 inches in height to yard.
- It is also important to note that furnaces in basements generally need at least 1 cubic foot of space for each 10 Btu/h rating of the particular furnace. Depending on the size of the basement and any partitions proposed, this may limit what can be done in a particular space.
- If any part of the space is to be used as a sleeping room, smoke alarms must be installed in each sleeping room, outside of each sleeping area and on each additional story of the dwelling. They must be interconnected and hard-wired with a battery back-up. This applies to the entire house, including basements.
- A carbon monoxide detector must be installed within 15 feet of every sleeping area.
- All of the above is just a summary of the basic requirements. Other requirements may apply. Depending on the specifics of your project, there are many different ways to satisfy the code requirements. We cannot design your project for you, but we will let you know if your design complies.
- If you have any questions about any of the above, please feel free to contact this office at (607) 739-7605 for more information.

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