Emergency Escape & Rescue Windows

General Purpose
Section 310 of the 2019 California Residential Code (CRC) regulates emergency escape and rescue windows in residential buildings. Because the majority of fires occur when occupants are asleep, the likelihood that people will first try to exit from these openings is very high. Therefore, the code has established that basements in residential dwellings and all sleeping rooms below the fourth story have windows and doors that may be used for emergency escape or rescue. Extensive research done by fire department personnel has determined the minimum allowed dimensions for the emergence openings; this adequately allows their rescue equipment in and out to serve for both rescue and escape.

Design Provisions
Location
The emergency escape and egress openings shall be located on the exterior of the building. This is intended for fire personnel to rescue the occupants from the exterior, and for occupants to exit directly out of the building without having to re-enter it.

Types and Sizes of Window Allowed
Emergency escape or rescue windows must have the following characteristics:

- Must be operational from the inside of the room and clear from obstructions,
- Must be of a usual type such as double-hung, horizontal sliding or casement windows operated by the turn of a crank,
- Do not require special knowledge or effort to operate,
- Must have a net clear opening width of 20-in and 24-in in height,
- Have a minimum net clear opening size of 5.7 Ft² (5 Ft² allowed at grade level), and
- Located no more than 44-in above the floor on the interior side to the window opening.

Window Wells
For emergency escape windows with a finished sill height below the adjacent ground elevation, these shall be provided with a window well with the following characteristics:

1. The clear horizontal dimension shall allow the window to be fully opened, provide a minimum accessible net clear opening of 9 Ft², with a 36-in minimum dimension; and
2. For window wells with more than 44-in of vertical depth, provide an approved permanently affixed ladder or stairs accessible with the window in the fully open position (the ladder/stairs cannot encroach into the required dimensions of the window well by more than 6-in. (Section R310.2.3.1 2019 CRC).

Security Devices
Emergency windows, doors or window wells may be provided with security devices such as grilles, bars and steel shutters, provided:

1. The devices are equipped with approved release mechanisms that are operable from the inside without the use of a key or special knowledge or effort; and
2. The building is equipped with smoke detectors.

Refer to the next page for typical window illustrations.

It is the owner’s responsibility to verify that the actual windows installed meet the minimum egress requirements.
Emergency Escape / Exit Windows (Elevation)

Minimum size window for 20-in clear width

Minimum size window for 44-in max to bottom of clear opening

Minimum size window for 24-in clear height

* Openable Area = 5.7 Ft²

* Exception: grade-floor window of 5.0 Ft²