

## Home inspections – About Egress and Safety

Evaluating safety issues, including emergency egress from bedrooms, is a critical part of any home inspection. Particularly now, our cold winter months are synonymous with the use of extension cords and old space heaters, the perfect recipe for a house fire. Sadly, tragedies occur every year because residents, especially small children, the elderly and disabled, cannot escape the building. The good news is that you don't need a trained home inspector to do your own simple safety inspection. Here are a few tips:

Bedroom window egress refers to our ability to get out of a bedroom and a firefighter with a respirator being able to get in. Unless there is a door to the exterior from the bedroom, there should be at least one opening window sized to allow for egress – that's 20 inches by 24 inches. Additionally, the lower sill should not be any higher than 44 inches from the floor. Older homes that pre-date this requirement may not have sufficient egress by current standards. In children's rooms where the window sill is tall, consider putting a toy box under the window.

Check to make sure all your bedroom windows open easily. Inspections often find old wooden sash windows that are painted closed, or will not stay open due to broken weights. Similarly, aluminum frame windows can be a struggle to open when tracks become dirty.

Basement bedrooms often have egress challenges with both small windows and high windows. In addition, the exterior window wells may be quite deep, deeper than a small child may be able to climb out of. Sometimes the grates put over the window wells to prevent someone from falling in are so heavy they are nearly impossible to move from below.

Concerns over security prompt some people to put bars over their windows. Sometimes, these have been permanently secured so escape is impossible. Some have been locked. It should not take a special key or device to open the bars and no more effort than opening the window.

Avoid using extension cords and space heaters if at all possible. If you must, be careful about putting heaters near combustibles, especially draperies and bedclothes. Be aware that if you have a problematic electric panel such as Zinsco, or Federal Pacific, the breakers may fail to trip and could overheat if you overload the circuit. If you have one of these panels, have an electrician check it out for safety.

Be sure your house number is clearly and easily visible from the street. That means big and bold. Anyone whose job involves finding addresses will tell you how difficult it can be sometimes to locate a house number. The last thing you want is for emergency services to have trouble finding you!

Make sure you have smoke detectors in the bedrooms *and* in the hallways outside the bedrooms. If you change your batteries with every time change, you'll never need worry about fresh batteries. Finally, if

you don't have a fire escape plan and practice it regularly, now is the time to start. Fumbling in the dark to get to the bathroom at 2:00 AM is one thing – trying to get you and yours outside in the dark when your house is full of smoke and flames is quite another.

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