

« Things to Consider Before Calling a Lower Level Room a Bedroom

Frequently a question is raised as to whether or not a "legal" bedroom can be located in the lower level of a home. The following are requirements from the [Department of Safety & Professional Standards Uniform Dwelling Code \(UDC\)](#) concerning "habitable rooms" (including bedrooms) located below grade. The Wisconsin Uniform Dwelling Code (UDC) applies to one and two family homes built on or after 12/1/1978. Prior to this date, each local municipality was responsible for its own code (if any). Homes built before 12/1/1978 are not required to be brought up to current UDC standards if no alterations or additions take place. However, if a home was built prior to June 1, 1980 and alterations or additions are being contemplated, contact the local municipality to determine the applicable code standards to be applied to the alterations or additions. You are encouraged to consult with appropriate third parties and check local ordinances to ensure all necessary requirements are met. Lower level rooms that do not meet safety guidelines for a bedroom should not be labeled as bedrooms in the MLS. A photo of the egress window is required for all lower level bedrooms, and must be added within 7 days of the list date.

Exits

- In general, all basements and ground floors must have at least one exit that is either a door to the exterior of the building or a stairway or ramp that leads to the floor above.
- If there is a bedroom in the basement or ground floor, there must be at least 2 exits located as far apart as practical.
- In addition to the required first exit above, the second exit can be: a door to the exterior of the dwelling; a stairway or ramp that leads to the floor above; a stairway that leads to a garage provided the garage has an exit door other than the overhead door; or an egress window (see below for the requirements of an egress window).

Windows

- In general, all habitable rooms must have natural light by means of glazed openings. The area of the glazed openings must be at least 8% of the net floor area of the habitable room. (NOTE: there are certain exceptions not applicable to bedrooms in the basement or ground floor)
- If the window is used for exit purposes ("egress window"), it must be openable from the inside without the use of tools or the removal of a sash (storm windows and screens must also be openable from the inside).
- The size of the net clear window opening of an egress window must be at least 20 inches by 24 inches (irrespective of height or width).
- The lowest point of the clear opening of an egress window must not be more than 60 inches above the floor.
- If the lowest point of the clear opening of an egress window is more than 46 inches above the floor, a permanent platform (at least 20" wide x 9" deep) must be installed so that the top of the platform is no more than 46 inches below the clear opening. (NOTE: The top of the platform cannot be more than 24 inches above the floor and must be capable of supporting at least 200 pounds).

Ceiling Height

- Bedrooms shall have a ceiling height of at least 7 feet. (NOTE: a bedroom may have ceiling heights of less than 7 feet provided a least 50% of the bedroom's floor area has a ceiling height of at least 7 feet).

Other Issues

- The above are general requirements concerning bedrooms in basements or ground floors.
- Other factors that should be considered, include but are not limited to:
 1. Is there proper electrical service (outlets, switches, etc) in the bedroom?
 2. Is there proper ventilation and interior circulation?
 3. If the property is served by a private waste disposal system (i.e., septic, mound, other), is that system "sized" and approved for another bedroom?
 4. What is the source of heating for the bedroom?
 5. What is the degree of "finishing" of the area adjacent to and/or used to access the bedroom?
 6. Is the size of the room sufficient to meet the needs of use as a bedroom?