



Development Services Center

SFR-13

Basement—Finish a Bedroom or Other Room— Requirements for a Residence

Reference: International Residential Code and Washington State Energy Code (WSEC)

1. Finishing a bedroom or other room in a basement requires a building permit and an electrical permit at a minimum. To determine the building permit cost, a reasonable estimate of the cost of construction is needed, labor and material. If the homeowner is doing the work, we need an estimated cost of material, and we will make an adjustment for labor. For interior remodel, the number of circuits that are going to be added or modified needs to be determined.
2. Please provide a drawing of the basement area, it should show the entire basement outline and identify the hall, laundry area, bathroom(s), bedroom(s), furnace and water heater areas (existing and proposed). Even if the drawing is to scale, please provide dimensions of the spaces. If necessary, provide a separate drawing of smaller spaces, at a larger scale, so any specific details may be noted. With this information, we should be able to review and issue these permits over the counter.
Habitable space in a basement is required to have a minimum ceiling height of 84 inches (7 feet). If the ceiling height is less than 84 inches (7 feet), the space can still be finished and used, but it is not considered habitable space and any sleeping rooms are not considered legal bedrooms for sale of the house.
3. All bedrooms require an egress window or a door directly to the outside from that sleeping room. Unless the City of Spokane has a record (a permit issued specifically for a bedroom) of a basement bedroom, it is not a legal bedroom unless it has an egress window or door opening directly to the outside. The egress window sill cannot be more than 44 inches above the finished floor. The window, in the open position, must have an opening a minimum 20 inches wide and 24 inches high. But then the code throws in a kicker. That opening must be at least 820 square inches. Basically a 4 X 4 sliding window will make this and a single or double hung window must be at least 3 feet wide and 5 feet tall. (Open the window and measure it just to be on the safe side prior to buying the window.)
4. All exposed concrete walls are required to be insulated in the area to be finished. WSEC requires a minimum R-21 insulation on the exterior walls. We recommend building a 2 X 4 wall with a treated bottom plate and pull the wall out from the concrete about 2 inches so the R-21 Batt insulation can be installed. A vapor barrier needs to be installed on the drywall side of the insulation. (The vapor barrier can be the facing on the batt insulation if it is face-stapled to the front of the studs or a minimum 4-mil plastic.) This wall is a non-bearing wall and usually only holds up the insulation, wiring and drywall so the studs could be 24 inches on center.

5. All new wiring in a bedroom is required to be arc-fault protected. An outlet is required within 6 feet of a door opening and then a maximum 12 feet apart. Any section of wall that is 2 feet or wider does require an outlet. It is suggested that you place an outlet within a couple of feet of the corners of the room to make sure the only outlet on that wall does not wind up behind the headboard of the bed. (Outlets are easy to install and relatively cheap before the drywall is installed.) Outlet spacing is the same as in a bedroom for all other habitable spaces.
6. When a new bedroom is created in the basement, or when there is an addition, the IRC requires line voltage smoke detectors with a battery backup be installed in each bedroom, outside the bedroom areas and at least 1 smoke detector on each floor level. The smoke detectors outside the bedroom areas can be used as the smoke detectors on that floor level. The smoke detectors are to be interlocked so if one is activated, all will sound.

Hardwired interconnection of smoke detectors not in the addition or remodeled area would not be required between floors in areas which would require the boring of members within enclosed wall or floor assemblies. If, however, an open chase exists for ductwork or plumbing, and provides a readily accessible means of fishing wiring (along side ductwork or plumbing) from floor to floor or other areas, the smoke detectors could practically be installed/ hardwired/ interconnected. The removal or rearrangement of insulation is not considered removal of finish material.

Note: Areas not accessible for hardwiring of smoke detectors would still require battery operated smoke detectors installed in each bedroom, outside bedroom areas and at least one smoke detector on each floor level.



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