

PART

1

Administration

Chapters 1 and 2



- **Chapter 1** Scope and Administration
- **Chapter 2** Definitions

The administration part of the *International Residential Code* (IRC) covers the general scope, purpose, applicability, and other administrative issues related to the regulation of residential buildings by building safety departments. The administrative provisions establish the responsibilities and duties of the various parties involved in residential construction and the applicability of the technical provisions within a legal, regulatory, and code-enforcement arena.

Section R101.2 establishes the criteria for buildings that are regulated by the IRC. Buildings beyond the scope of Section R101.2 are regulated by the *International Building Code* (IBC). The remaining topics in the administration provisions of Chapter 1 include the establishment of the building safety department, duties of the building official, permits, construction documents, and inspections.

The definitions contained within the IRC are intended to reflect the special meaning of such terms within the scope of the code. As terms can often have multiple meanings within their ordinary day-to-day use or within the various disciplines of the construction industry, it is important that their meanings within the context of the IRC be understood. Most definitions used throughout the IRC are found in Chapter 2, but additional definitions specific to the applicable topics are found in the energy provisions of Chapter 11, the fuel gas provisions of Chapter 24, and the electrical provisions of Chapter 35. ■

R 102.7.1

Additions, Alterations or Repairs

R 202

Definition of Emergency Escape and Rescue Opening

R 202

Definition of Townhouse

R102.7.1

Additions, Alterations or Repairs

CHANGE TYPE: Clarification

CHANGE SUMMARY: The code references the *International Existing Building Code*® (IEBC®) only when alterations are part of a change to a use or occupancy outside the scope of the IRC.

2021 CODE: R102.7.1 Additions, alterations or repairs. Additions, alterations or repairs to any structure shall conform to the requirements for a new structure without requiring the existing structure to comply with the requirements of this code, unless otherwise stated. Additions, alterations, repairs and relocations shall not cause an existing structure to become unsafe or adversely affect the performance of the building; less compliant with the provisions of this code than the existing building or structure was prior to the addition, alteration or repair. An existing building together with its additions shall comply with the height limits of this code. Where the alteration causes the use or occupancy to be changed to one not within the scope of this code, the provisions of the *International Existing Building Code* shall apply.

CHANGE SIGNIFICANCE: As with other international codes, the IRC provides relief for existing buildings to allow the legal occupancy to continue without fully complying with current codes. To impose regulations to bring existing buildings into current compliance would be impractical and unreasonable. This provision also applies to existing buildings undergoing modifications or additions. Generally, only the modification or addition need comply with the current code. Previous editions of the IRC stated that additions, alterations or repairs could not cause any portion of the existing building to become unsafe or otherwise adversely affect the performance of the building. For clarification, that provision has changed to state that modifications cannot cause the existing building to become less compliant with the



Addition to a single-family dwelling.

current code. Additional language emphasizes that the building height limitations still apply to additions. The relationship of the IEBC to the IRC has caused some confusion and is clarified in the added language. The IEBC offers alternative compliance paths for renovations to existing buildings. The code now only sends users to the IEBC if the alteration or addition is part of a change of use or change of occupancy that takes the building outside the scope of the IRC. That is, the new use is classified as a building under the IBC and the IEBC applies to the modifications. Similarly, the IEBC states in an exception to its scope that modifications to one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses and their accessory buildings are regulated either by the IEBC or the IRC. Appendix J of the IRC also offers guidance and alternatives for compliance with the code during renovation of existing buildings. The appendix chapters are only in effect if specifically adopted by the jurisdiction. Appendix J provisions, similar to those found in the IEBC, intend to encourage the continued use or reuse of legally existing buildings and structures.

R202

Definition of Emergency Escape and Rescue Opening

CHANGE TYPE: Clarification

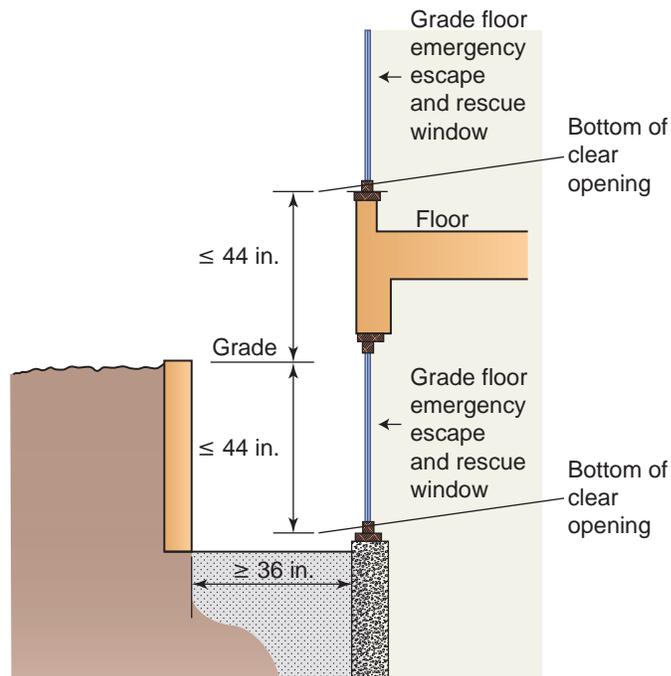
CHANGE SUMMARY: Definitions for emergency escape and rescue openings and grade floor openings have been updated for clarification and to be consistent with the IBC.

2021 CODE: R202 DEFINITIONS

EMERGENCY ESCAPE AND RESCUE OPENING. An operable exterior window, door or other similar device that provides for a means of escape and access for rescue in the event of an emergency. (See also “Grade floor emergency escape and rescue opening.”)

GRADE FLOOR EMERGENCY ESCAPE AND RESCUE OPENING. ~~A window or other~~ An emergency escape and rescue opening located such that the ~~sill height~~ bottom of the clear opening is not more than 44 inches (1118 mm) above or below the finished ground level adjacent to the opening. (See also “Emergency escape and rescue opening.”)

CHANGE SIGNIFICANCE: The emergency escape and rescue provisions have regularly undergone revisions in past code cycles and the same is true of the 2021 IRC. In conjunction with the reorganization and new text in Section R310, two related definitions have been revised. In part, these changes are for consistency with the IBC and other I-Codes. They also clarify their meaning and application. In the 2012 IRC, the measurement for the maximum height of the emergency escape opening (often referred to as the sill height) was clearly spelled out as the distance from the finished floor to the lowest point of the net clear opening. Traditionally that



Grade floor emergency escape and rescue openings require only 5.0 sq. ft. of clear area.

has been interpreted and used as the intent of the code, even when the terminology was more ambiguous. The measurement language of the 2012 code was dropped in the 2015 and 2018 editions. Now the definition clearly spells out that the measurement is taken to the lowest point of the opening, which may or may not be a traditional windowsill.

There have been similar misunderstandings related to the definition of grade floor opening. Section R310 has always allowed a reduction in the area of the net clear opening for emergency escape and rescue openings close to grade. This is based on the reduced hazard when compared to escape and rescue from a second or third story opening. However, the definition previously did not mention emergency escape and rescue and its connection to Section R310 was not apparent. As a result, there has been some confusion as to when the exception for reduced opening area was in effect. The code stated that the exception applied to grade floor openings and below grade openings. A literal interpretation of this language would allow a below grade opening deeper than 44 inches below grade and still take advantage of the size reduction, though that was not the intent. To make the connection clear, the definition has been revised to include emergency escape and rescue in the term.

R202

Definition of Townhouse

CHANGE TYPE: Clarification

CHANGE SUMMARY: A revised definition of townhouse (a building) and a new definition for townhouse unit (a dwelling unit) clarify the appropriate use of the terms.

2021 CODE: R202 DEFINITIONS

BUILDING. Any one- or two-family dwelling or townhouse, or portion thereof, ~~including townhouses~~, used or intended to be used for human habitation, for living, sleeping, cooking or eating purposes, or any combination thereof, or any accessory structure. For the definition applicable in Chapter 11, see Section N1101.6.

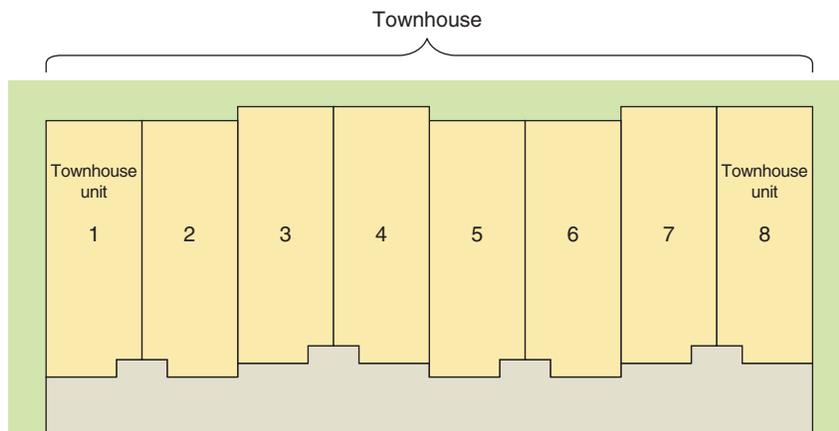
TOWNHOUSE. A ~~single-family dwelling unit constructed in a group of building that contains~~ three or more attached townhouse units, ~~in which each unit extends from foundation to roof and with a yard or public way on not less than two sides.~~

TOWNHOUSE UNIT. A single-family dwelling unit in a townhouse that extends from foundation to roof and that has a yard or public way on not less than two sides.

CHANGE SIGNIFICANCE: There has been some confusion and certainly some inconsistency in the use of the term “townhouse.” Previously, a townhouse was defined as a single-family dwelling unit in a group of three or more dwelling units in one building. However, the term was used interchangeably to describe the entire building and the individual dwelling units within that building. The new definition of “townhouse unit” intends to remedy that inconsistency. A townhouse unit describes each individual single-family dwelling unit in a townhouse building. Therefore, a townhouse is a building that contains three or more townhouse units. The new terms appear in the townhouse provisions of Section R302.2 and in other locations throughout the code. The definition of building has also been updated to make a direct reference to townhouse in addition to one- and two-family dwellings and accessory structures.



Townhouse.



Townhouse with 8 townhouse units.