

Two Unit Houses Existing Prior to JULY 14, 1994

Any rental unit, old or new, must comply with the standards set out in the Ontario Fire Code. There are four key areas regarding fire code compliance, all having to do with the safety of the occupants:



Fire containment



Fire detection & alarms



Mean of egress



Fire suppression

Fire Containment

The goal is to contain the fire in the unit that the fire started, long enough to get all of the occupants out of the house. This means that any walls, floors, ceilings and doors between units should control the fire for a minimum prescribed time. These components are given 'Fire Resistance Rating' of how long they will survive a direct fire before burning through. A 30-minute rating means that the component will withstand the fire for at least 30 minutes.

The typical requirement is a 30-minute separation between the units.

- Drywall and plaster are acceptable but suspended (T-bar type) ceilings are not.

- The ceiling must be continuous. For example, this means that you can't have exposed joists in the furnace room – this area has to be covered with drywall or plaster as well.*
- Doors and door frames in walls that are fire separations should be metal or solid wood that is at least 45 millimetres (1¾ inch) thick and have a rating of 20 minutes and be equipped with self-closing devices that ensures the door closes and latches under its own power.

* *Flame Spread Ratings* which determine how quickly the fire on a burning material will spread are also considered, meaning materials like wood paneling are not ordinarily acceptable.



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Ontario Fire Code Two Unit Houses

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Barrie





Means of Egress – Escaping the Home

The goal is to allow the occupants to get out of the house if there is a fire. There are two common situations; either each unit has its own exit, or there is a common exit. If each unit has its own exit, you are all set. If the units share an exit, it is more complicated.

A common exit is allowed if it is fire separated from both of the units with a 30-minute rating. If the common exit is not appropriately fire separated, you can still use this common exit as long as there is a second exit from each dwelling unit and the fire alarms are interconnected (if one alarm sounds, the others will sound as well). The second exit is typically a window.



What is an acceptable window?

- The windowsill must be within 1 metre (3 feet) of grade. We don't want people jumping and breaking a leg.
- If the windowsill is more than 3 feet above the inside floor, there must be fixed steps to the sill.

- The smallest dimension is 0.5 metres (~18 inches).
- The opening is at least 0.38 square metres (~4 ft²).

- If a basement window has a window well, it must extend 1 meter (3 feet) out from the house wall, to allow room to crawl out.
- If there is a window well, the window must open into the dwelling unit and not interfere with escape. The window must be openable without the use of tools or special knowledge.



Fire Detection

All units must have smoke alarms on every floor and audible from the bedrooms (when doors are closed). The owner of the property is responsible for the installation and maintenance. The smoke alarms do not have to be interconnected unless the fire separation to the common exit area does not have a 30-minute rating (Note: It must have at least a 15-minute rating). Interconnection may also be required if a unit is located on a third floor. Carbon monoxide detectors are also required.



Suppression

While sprinkler systems are not mandatory, their installation may lower the requirements for fire containment in a room with a fuel fired appliance. The installation only exempts the ceiling above the appliance(s) from fire rating so additional containment may still be required and the owner must obtain a plumbing permit to meet the sprinkler requirements in the fire code. The fire department must review the permit to ensure that the installation meets the requirements for fire containment.



Electrical Inspection

In order to ensure that the electrical wiring in a two unit dwelling is safe, the owner is responsible for having a general inspection conducted by the Electrical Safety Authority (ESA) and must pay for the associated inspection fees. Any electrical hazards identified during the inspection must be repaired. Owners should retain the letter of compliance from ESA for future reference purposes. This letter must be made available to the Chief Fire Official upon request.

