



Construction Requirements for a Secondary Suite in a Single Family Dwelling

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Purpose:

To assist owners and builders with the minimum requirements for the construction of a Secondary Suite or alterations to an existing building to accommodate a Secondary Suite.

Background:

A Secondary Suite is an additional dwelling unit located in and is part of a residential building that is a single real estate entity. The Suite must not have more than 90m² (970 sq. ft.) of total floor space and less than 40% of the habitable floor space of the building. Only one additional dwelling unit is permitted.

Implementation:

The following information is provided to clarify some critical life safety requirements for the construction of a Secondary Suite or alterations to an existing building to accommodate a Secondary Suite.

• **Fire Separation between a Secondary Suite and Main Dwelling Unit**

- A minimum 45 minutes fire resistance rating is required for walls and ceilings between suites. For walls, this can be achieved with one layer ½" type X gypsum wall board on both sides of a stud frame and for ceilings, with one layer ⅝" type X gypsum wall board; or
- A minimum 30 minutes fire resistance rating is permitted for the walls and ceiling between suites if interconnected smoke alarms are installed as per guideline below. For walls, this can be achieved with one layer ½" gypsum wall board on both sides of a stud frame and, with one layer ½" type X or ⅝" gypsum wall board for ceiling. (See smoke alarm below)

*Note: There are some limitations on the penetrations through the ceiling membrane (see Appendix D of BCBC).

- **Smoke Alarms** – If the fire separation between the Secondary Suite and the Main Dwelling Unit is less than 45 minutes, interconnected photo-electric type smoke alarms are required to be installed in each suite in addition to smoke alarms required by Subsection 9.10.19.
- **Combustible Water Piping** up to a maximum diameter of 30mm is permitted to penetrate a fire separation, provided the penetration is fire stopped.
- **Combustible Drain, Waste and Vent Piping** is permitted to penetrate a fire separation, provided the pipe is located within a wall or floor/ceiling assembly protected by a minimum of ½" gypsum board, and the penetration through the wall membrane is tightly fitted. The pipe is not permitted to penetrate a ceiling membrane.
- **Air Ducts and Fire Dampers** – It is preferable for the Secondary Suite to have its own forced-air heating or ventilation system independent of the Main Dwelling Unit. If heating and/or ventilation ducts are serving both the Secondary Suite and Main Dwelling Unit, a duct-type smoke detector must be installed to shut down the heating and/or ventilation system. In addition, if heating and ventilation ducts are serving both a Secondary Suite and the Main Dwelling Unit, they must be equipped with fire dampers where penetrating required fire separations.
- **Central Vacuum Systems** – are not permitted to serve more than one suite.

These are not complete construction requirements. The owner/builder should consult Section 9.36 of the BC Building Code for complete secondary suite construction requirements.

Should you have any questions, comments or suggestions concerning this bulletin, please contact the Building Approvals Department at 604-276-4285.

See over →



1) Smoke Alarms

- Are photo-electric interconnected smoke alarms being used?
 YES NO

2) Combustible Water Piping

- Is 1" diameter combustible water piping being used?
 YES* NO
- * If yes, is fire-stopping at suite fire separation being provided?
 YES NO

3) Combustible Drain, Waste and Vent Piping

- Is combustible DWV piping being used?
 YES NO
- Does the DWV penetrate the fire separation between suites?
 YES NO
- * If yes, is DWV piping being protected by minimum of ½" gypsum board?
 YES NO

4) Air Ducts and Fire Dampers

- Is a single forced-air heating system being used for both suites?
 YES* NO
- * If Yes, is a fire damper being installed on penetration of the suite fire separations?
 YES NO
- * If Yes, is a duct-type smoke detector being installed?
 YES NO
- Is a single forced-air ventilation system being used for both suites?
 YES* NO
- * If yes, is a fire damper being installed on penetration of the suite fire separations?
 YES NO

5) Central Vacuum Systems

- Is a central vacuum system serving both suites being used?
 YES NO