

## Purpose

The purpose of the guideline is to help improve consistency with the installation, education and enforcement of guards in a Part 9 residential building situation, where a difference in elevation greater than 600 mm (24") is located between a window well and the adjacent grade, a retaining wall and the lower adjacent grade, or a structure and the lower adjacent level.

It is very common in Rocky View County to see a larger window well in the construction of a new or the renovation of an existing home, which is greater than 600 mm (24") deep. It is also common to see basement walk-up stairwells and retaining walls that are adjacent to the house superstructure. Each of these scenarios creates a situation where people could fall from one level to an adjacent lower level.

There is also a requirement within the National Building Code 2019 Alberta Edition to provide safety for occupants. This requirement is of equal or greater importance, and must be met by providing a means of escape from a house through a bedroom window, in the event of an emergency.



## Code Reference

National Building Code 2019 Alberta Edition Division B Article 9.8.8.1.  
2015 Illustrated Users Guide – NBC 2015 Part 9 of Division B Housing and Small Buildings 9.8.8.1.  
Required Guards



## Summary

The requirements of this Guideline are applicable to, and provide clarity towards the options available for ensuring compliance to the National Building Code 2019 Alberta Edition when installing a window well or where an adjacent level poses a possible fall hazard to a level that is 2 feet or more below the surface.



## Interpretation

Guards are intended to prevent people from falling from one level to an adjacent level. Generally, guards are required for the open sides of stairs, ramps, landings, balconies, porches, decks, mezzanines, galleries, and raised walkways where there is a difference in elevation of more than 600 mm (24") between the walking surface and the adjacent surface or where the adjacent surface within 1.2 m (4 ft) of the walking surface has a slope of more than 1:2.

Guards must be installed as per the following methods:

1. Window Wells Adjacent to Grade / Landscaping – Where a window well is more than 600 mm (24”) deep, and located in a private residential yard, a guard is not required. This scenario includes situations where a walkway runs alongside the window well(s), and is applicable to window wells of all sizes.
2. Window Wells Adjacent to Structures – Where a window well is adjacent to a structure like a stair, ramp, landing, balcony, porch, deck, mezzanine, gallery or raised walkway, and the distance between the walking surface and the bottom of the window well is more than 600 mm (24”), a guard must be installed to prevent falling into the well.
3. Bedroom Egress Windows – Bedroom windows which provide egress from the bedroom should meet the following requirements.
  - a) Covers or grates over a window well serving as egress from a bedroom are not permitted.
  - b) When an egress bedroom window is located adjacent to, or completely within a structure such as a deck, the guard shall not restrict evacuation from the window well. In these scenarios, a guard must be placed along the long edge of the window well and along one side, or that portion of the window well adjacent to the structure, but must not enclose the window well entirely.
4. Guards Along Retaining Walls – Where a retaining wall is adjacent to the superstructure of the dwelling unit, a guard shall be installed. This includes retaining walls constructed to create a forced walk-out scenario.



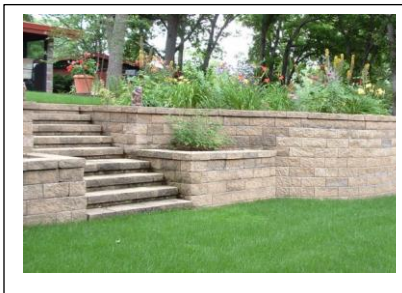
## Illustrations



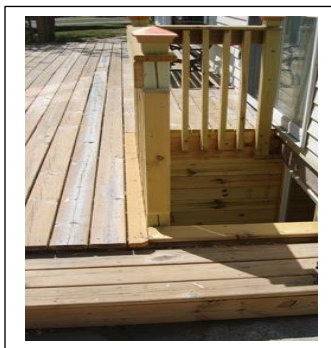
**Guard Not Required**  
Window well adjacent to grade



**Guard Required**  
Window well adjacent to stairway



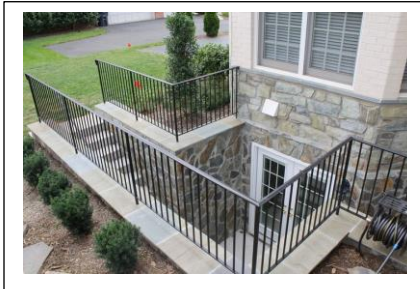
**Guard Not Required**  
Retaining wall not attached to dwelling unit.  
Considered landscaping



**Guard Required on Long Edge**  
Egress Bedroom window well surrounded by structure, deeper than 600 mm to bottom of well. Guard required on long edge and one side, to permit egress and provide protection from falling.



**Guard NOT Required**  
Window well adjacent to landscaping



**Guard Required**  
Retaining wall attached to the dwelling unit



Approval Date

- March, 2020

Last Review Date

- March, 2020