



# 2012 BC Building Code

## Summary of Secondary Suite Requirements

(Convenience consolidation of the BC Building Code)

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### Secondary Suite means a dwelling unit:

- having a total floor space of not more than 90m<sup>2</sup> in area,
- having a floor space less than 40% of the habitable floor space of the *building*,
- located within a *building* of *residential occupancy* containing only one other *dwelling unit*, and
- located in and part of a *building* which is a single real estate entity. (See A-9.37.1.1. in Appendix A of Division B.).

**NOTE: Appendix A references have been included in the booklet for your convenience.**

### 9.37.1. General

#### 9.37.1.1. Application

1) This Section applies to construction of a *secondary suite* and *alterations* to an existing building to accommodate a *secondary suite*. (See Appendix A.)

#### 9.37.1.2. Construction Requirements

1) Construction of a *secondary suite* <and> *alterations* to an existing *building* to accommodate a *secondary suite* shall conform to the requirements in this Part except as provided in this Section. (See Appendix A)

### 9.37.2. Specific Requirements

#### 9.37.2.1. Heights of Rooms or Spaces

1) The minimum height of rooms or spaces in a *secondary suite* over the required minimum area as indicated in Table 9.5.3.1. shall be not less than 2.0 m.

2) It shall be possible to travel from the required area of one room to the required areas of all other rooms within a *secondary suite* without reduction of the room height as required in Sentence (1).

#### 9.37.2.2. Solid Blocking

1) Solid blocking may be omitted for doors described in Sentence 9.7.5.2.(9) where the interior wall finish adjacent the door is in place prior to the construction of a *secondary suite*.

#### 9.37.2.3. Exit Stairs

1) *Exit* stairs within or serving a *building* that contains a *secondary suite* shall have a minimum width, measured between wall faces or guards, of not less than 860 mm. (See Appendix A.)

#### 9.37.2.4. Dimensions of Landings

1) Landings for exterior stairs serving both *suites* in a *building* containing a *secondary suite* need not exceed 900 mm in length.

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### 9.37.2.5. Handrails and Guards

1) Handrails and *guards* shall conform to the requirements of Subsections 9.8.7. and 9.8.8. as if serving only one *dwelling unit*.

### 9.37.2.6. Means of Egress

1) The width of every *public corridor* and *exit corridor* that serves a *building* that contains a *secondary suite* shall be not less than 860 mm. (See Appendix A.)

### 9.37.2.7. Fire Separations for Exits

1) Except as permitted by Sentence (2), every *exit* other than an *exit doorway* shall be separated from adjacent *floor areas* by a *fire separation*

- a) having a *fire-resistance rating* of 45 min, or
- b) having a *fire-resistance rating* of not less than 30 min where the *dwelling units* are equipped with *smoke alarms* as referenced in Article 9.37.2.19.

2) A *<fire-resistance rating>* is not required for a *fire separation* that separates an *exit* from adjacent *floor areas* where the *building* is *sprinklered*.

### 9.37.2.8. Openings Near Unenclosed Exit Stairs and Ramps

1) Where an unenclosed exterior *exit stair* or *ramp* provides the only *means of egress* from a *dwelling unit* in a *building* that contains a *secondary suite* and the stair is exposed to the hazards of fire from *unprotected openings* in the exterior wall of another *fire compartment*, the openings shall be protected in conformance with Articles 9.10.13.5. to 9.10.13.7. (See Appendix A.)

### 9.37.2.9. Doors in a Means of Egress

1) Every *exit door* or door that opens into or is located within a *public corridor* or other *facility* that provides access to *exit* from a *suite* shall

- a) be not less than 1980 mm high,
- b) have a clear opening width of not less than 800 mm, and
- c) be permitted to swing inward.

### 9.37.2.10. Travel Limit to Exits or Egress Doors

1) In a *building* that contains a *secondary suite*, the travel limit from a floor level in a *dwelling unit* to an *exit* or *egress door* may exceed 1 *storey* provided the floor level within the *dwelling unit* is served by an operable window conforming to Article 9.9.10.1.

### 9.37.2.11. Shared Egress Facilities

1) Except as provided in Article 9.9.7.3., where an *egress door* from a *dwelling unit* opens onto a *public corridor* or exterior passageway, it shall be possible from the location where the *egress door* opens onto the *public corridor* or exterior passageway to go in opposite directions to 2 separate *exits* unless the *dwelling unit* is served by a second and separate *means of egress* or an opening window conforming to Article 9.9.10.1.

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- 2) Each *dwelling unit* shall be provided with a second and separate *means of egress* or an opening window conforming to Article 9.9.10.1. where the egress door from either *dwelling unit* opens onto
- a) an *exit stairway* that serves both *suites*,
  - b) a *public corridor* serving both *suites* and served by a single *exit stairway*,
  - c) an exterior passageway serving both *suites* and served by a single *exit stairway*, or
  - d) a balcony serving both *suites* and served by a single *exit stairway*.

### 9.37.2.12. Exit Signs

- 1) *Exit signs* are not required within a *building* that contains a *secondary suite*.

### 9.37.2.13. Structural Fire Resistance

- 1) Table 9.10.8.1., Fire-Resistance Ratings for Structural Members and Assemblies, does not apply to a *building* that contains a *secondary suite*.

### 9.37.2.14. Combustible Drain, Waste and Vent Piping

(See Appendix A.)

- 1) *Combustible* drain, waste and vent piping is permitted to be located within or penetrate a *fire separation* required to have a *fire-resistance rating* provided
- a) except for the permitted penetration in Clause (b), the *combustible* piping is located within an assembly protected by a membrane of a minimum 12.7 mm gypsum board,
  - b) the permitted penetration through the gypsum board membrane is limited in size to the diameter of the penetrating pipe, and
  - c) the *combustible* piping does not penetrate the gypsum board protection membrane on the underside of a horizontal *fire separation*.
- 2) *Combustible* drain, waste and vent piping enclosed in an assembly or protected as described in Sentence (1) is permitted on both sides of a *fire separation*. (See Appendix A)

### 9.37.2.15. Separation of Residential Suites

- 1) *Dwelling units* in a *building* that contains a *secondary suite* shall be separated from each other by
- a) a *fire separation* conforming to Article 9.10.9.14.,
  - b) a *fire separation* having a *fire-resistance rating* of not less than 30 min. where the *dwelling units* are equipped with *smoke alarms* conforming to Article 9.37.2.19., or
  - c) a *fire separation* having no required *fire-resistance rating* where the *building* is *sprinklered*.
- <See Appendix A and Appendix Note A-9.37.2.17. of Appendix A.>

### 9.37.2.16. Separation of Public Corridors

- 1) A *public corridor* serving a *building* that contains a *secondary suite* shall be separated from the *suites* by
- a) a *fire separation* conforming to Article 9.10.9.15.,
  - b) a *fire separation* having a *fire-resistance rating* of not less than 30 <min> where the *dwelling units* are equipped with *smoke alarms* conforming to Article 9.37.2.19., or

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c) a *fire separation* having no required *fire resistance rating* where the *building* is *sprinklered*.  
(See Appendix A)

#### 9.37.2.17. Air Ducts and Fire Dampers

<(See Appendix A.)>

- 1) Where a heating or ventilation duct system serves more than one *suite*, the system shall be designed and installed to prevent the circulation of smoke upon a signal from a duct-type *smoke detector*.
- 2) Ducts penetrating *fire separations* need not be equipped with *fire dampers* in conformance with Article 3.1.8.9. provided they are *noncombustible* with all openings in the duct system serving only one *fire compartment*.

#### 9.37.2.18. Exposing Building Face of Houses

- 1) Except as required by Article 9.10.15.3., in *buildings* that contain a *secondary suite*, the requirements of Article 9.10.14.5. do not apply provided
  - a) the *exposing building face* has a *fire-resistance rating* of not less than 45 min where the *limiting distance* is less than 1.2 m, and
  - b) the *exposing building face* is clad with *noncombustible* material where the *limiting distance* is less than 0.6 m.
- 2) Window openings in the *exposing building face* referred to in Sentence (1) shall
  - a) not be permitted where the *limiting distance* is less than 1.2 m and
  - b) be limited in conformance with the requirements for *unprotected openings* in Article 9.10.14.4. where the *limiting distance* is 1.2 m or greater.

#### 9.37.2.19. Smoke Alarms

<(See Appendix A.)>

- 1) Except as permitted by Sentence (3), an additional *smoke alarm* of photo-electric type conforming to CAN/ULC-S531, "Standard for Smoke Alarms," shall be installed in each *suite*.
- 2) *Smoke alarms* required in Sentence (1) shall be wired so that the activation of the additional alarm in one *suite* will cause the additional alarm in the other *suite* to sound.
- 3) An additional interconnected *smoke alarm* is not required to be installed in each *suite* provided
  - a) the *fire separations* required in Articles 9.37.2.16. and 9.37.2.17. have a *fire resistance rating* of 45 min or greater, or
  - b) the *building* is *sprinklered*.

#### 9.37.2.20. Sound Control

- 1) The assemblies separating the residential *suites* need not comply with the sound control requirements of Subsection 9.11.2. (See Appendix A)

#### 9.37.2.21. Attic Space Access

- 1) An attic space access hatchway not less than 0.32 m<sup>2</sup> in an area with no dimension less than <500 mm> may serve both *suites* in a *building* that contains a *secondary suite*.

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### 9.37.2.22. Garages and Carports

1) Section 9.35. is applicable to garages and carports serving a *building* that contains a *secondary suite*.

## APPENDIX A

### A-9.37.1.1. Application

It is intended that Section 9.37. apply to the construction of a secondary suite, whether as an addition to an existing building or as part of the construction of a new building. This Section may also be used as a standard for assessing an existing additional dwelling unit located in a single family dwelling building (house), but is not intended to be applied as a retroactive code to these existing units.

It is intended that the definition reflects that a secondary suite is an additional dwelling unit of limited size located within a house. Many of the changes in Section 9.37. are premised on the condition of the limited size of the secondary suite, which may directly or indirectly relate to issues such as occupant load, travel distance and egress dimensions.

In order for an additional dwelling unit to be considered a secondary suite, the following criteria must apply:

- There is only one secondary suite permitted in the building.
- It must be located in a building containing only residential occupancy.
- The secondary suite is located in or is part of a building containing only one other dwelling unit.
- The area of the secondary suite cannot exceed 90 m<sup>2</sup> of finished living area. (This does not include the areas used for common storage, common laundry facilities or common areas used for egress.)
- The area of the secondary suite cannot exceed 40% of the total living floor space (area) of the building it is located in. (The living floor area of the building does not include attached storage garages.)
- The secondary suite cannot be subdivided from the building it is part of under the Strata Property Act. This means that both dwelling units are registered under the same title.

### A-9.37.1.2. Construction Requirements

The requirements of Part 9 of the British Columbia Building Code apply to the construction of a secondary suite and the alterations to a building to incorporate a secondary suite, except those specifically referenced in Subsection 9.37.2.

A secondary suite may be constructed in a building that has been in existence for many years and that may not comply with current code requirements. As it may not be feasible to comply with the current Code, discretion should be used provided it does not substantially reduce the level of safety intended by the Code. For example, existing stairs may not comply with current rise or run requirements; winders may not have the 150 mm tread at the narrow end; guards may be a few millimeters lower than now required.

In some cases, existing sidelights or windows may not comply with the Code's safety or security requirements. Acceptable safety requirements can be achieved by applying decals, rails or safety films.

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Insulation requirements may not comply with the current Code; window and door glazing may not be insulated or installed in thermally broken frames.

Fire stops are required to be installed in new additions and in exposed existing locations, but it is not intended either that existing finishes be removed to check for the presence of fire stops or that new fire stops be installed.

Doors required to have a 20 min fire-protection rating, or to be 45 mm solid core wood, may be mounted in existing door frames that are less than 38 mm in thickness if it would require substantial framing alterations to accommodate a 38 mm thick frame.

It is not the intent to retroactively apply the current Code to all existing features in order to permit the construction of a secondary suite in an existing building.

### **A-9.37.2.3.(1) Exit Stairs**

Existing internal and external stairs that formerly served one dwelling unit may now serve both the existing dwelling unit and the new secondary suite. It is not the intent to apply all current Code exit stair requirements in order to permit the construction of a secondary suite in an existing building.

### **A-9.37.2.6. Means of Egress**

The additional occupant load created by a secondary suite does not warrant increasing the width of a public corridor, common exit stair or landing used by both dwelling units. The stairs, corridors and landings formerly serving one dwelling unit are likely to be of adequate size to accommodate the occupant load of both suites.

### **A-9.37.2.8. Openings near Unenclosed Exit Stairs and Ramps**

Unprotected door or window openings in other fire compartments adjacent to exit stairs and ramps should be protected from the other suite to provide safe passage to a safe area. Normally such protection as required by Part 9 would extend both vertically and horizontally beyond the adjacent openings. This is considered excessive due to required fire safety measures and the relatively short travel distances in this type of building. The application of current Part 9 requirements would in many cases require the protection of all openings in entire faces of dwelling units, which could be very restrictive. Authorities should exercise judgment with regard to deciding which openings are close enough to the exit facility to pose a problem during the early stages of a fire and require appropriate opening protection. Those openings that directly pass the means of egress are required to be protected.

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**A-9.37.2.14. Combustible Drain, Waste and Vent Piping**

Exposed combustible drain, waste and vent piping that penetrates a fire separation is required to be protected as described. This protection is not required for exposed fixture traps and arms serving fixtures within the suite provided they are not exposed from the underside of a horizontal fire separation. The intent is not to require removal of existing combustible piping which, as a result of the creation of a secondary suite, may now be on both sides of a rated fire separation. Rather, the intent is to protect this piping where it is exposed.

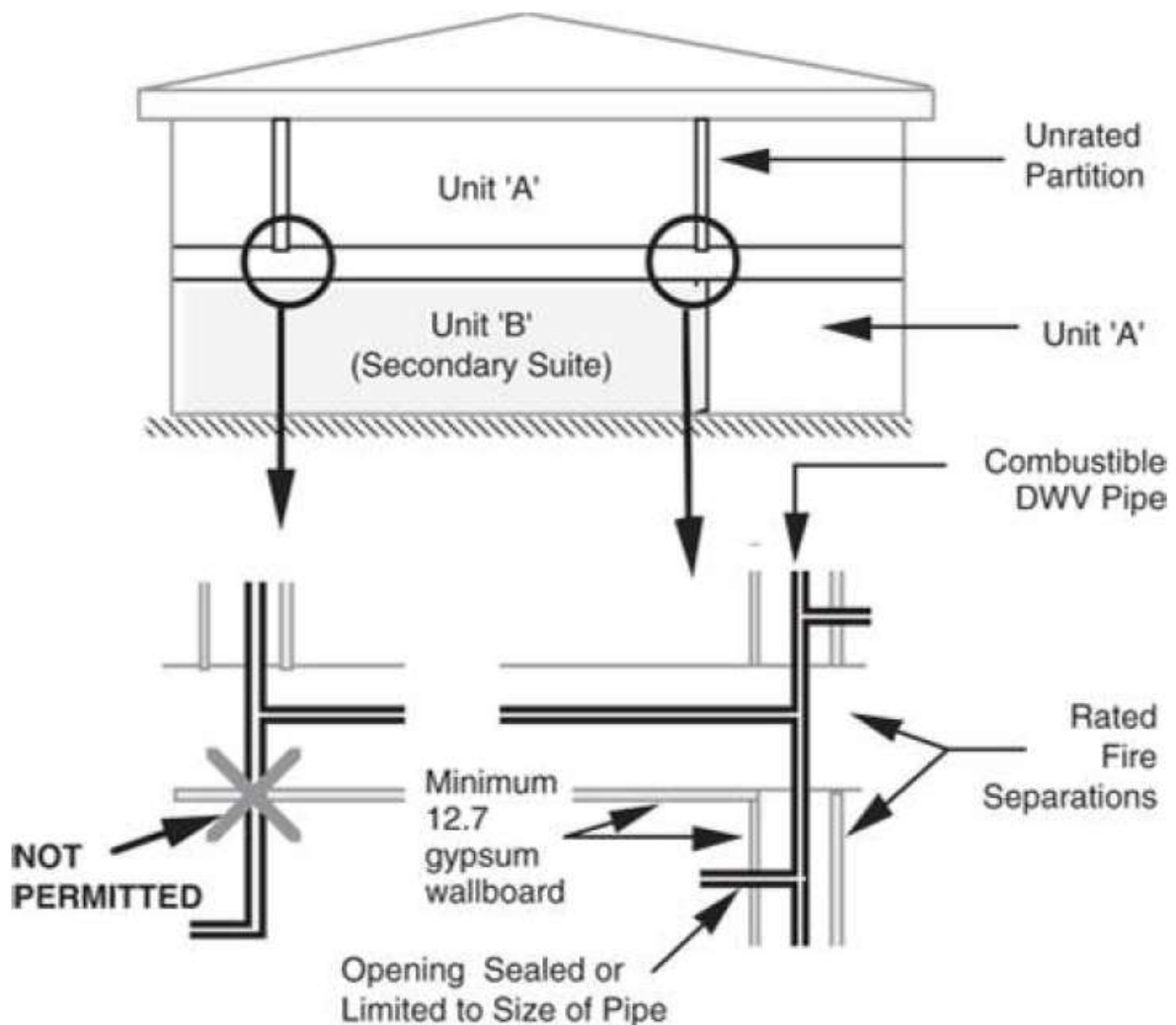


Figure A-9.37.2.14.  
Combustible Drain, Waste and Vent Pipe

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#### **A-9.37.2.15. and 16. Separation of Residential Suites and Public Corridors**

Two options are permitted for the separation of residential suites required by Article 9.10.9.14. and the separation of suites and public corridors required by Article 9.10.9.15.

One option is to separate the suites with a fire separation having a fire-resistance rating of 30 minutes and provide in each suite an additional smoke alarm interconnected with the smoke alarm in the other suite (described in Article 9.37.2.19.). A 30 min fire-resistance rating can be achieved with 12.7 mm Type X gypsum board on framing 400 mm o.c. for vertical assemblies, and 12.7 mm Type X or 15.9 mm gypsum board on frame floor/ceiling assemblies. This is often typical construction in modern single dwelling houses. This option will provide an equivalent level of life safety as the occupants of the building will be made aware of the hazard by an automatic detection system in the early stages allowing them early evacuation.

The second option is to provide an automatic sprinkler system conforming to an NFPA standard throughout the building (i.e. both suites and common areas). With this provision, no fire-resistance rating is required, but the suites must still be separated by a fire separation. Automatic sprinkler systems are a recognized alternative to fire-resistance ratings as a sprinkler system should control the fire at its early stage, preventing its propagation.

#### **A-9.37.2.17. Air Ducts and Fire Dampers**

In order to prevent the migration of smoke from one suite to another during a fire, heating or ventilation systems incorporating ducts that serve both suites are permitted only if there is a mechanism to prevent smoke being circulated from one unit to the other. It is preferable for the secondary suite to have its own heating system independent of the rest of the building.

#### **A-9.37.2.19. Smoke Alarms**

This Article requires an interconnected photoelectric smoke alarm in each suite where fire separations having a fire resistance rating of 30 min are used. The purpose of these interconnected alarms is to provide early warning to both suites in the event of a fire in one suite. Photoelectric type alarms are required as they are less prone to nuisance false alarms such as can occur during cooking, but careful consideration is still required as to their location.

It is important to note that these alarms are additional to the requirements of Subsection 9.10.19. and that each suite is still required to be provided with alarms in conformance with Subsection 9.10.19.

The additional smoke alarm should not be interconnected to the other smoke alarm(s) located within the same suite.

This additional smoke alarm system is not required when the fire-resistance ratings required in Articles 9.10.9.14. and 9.10.9.15. are not reduced, or when the building is sprinklered.  
9.10.9.14. and 9.10.9.15. are not reduced, or when the building is sprinklered.

#### **A-9.37.2.20. Sound Control**

Meeting the Code's level of sound transmission for secondary suites may be difficult and expensive, particularly in an existing building. As there is single ownership of both dwelling units, this requirement is not mandatory but designers are encouraged to take the subject into consideration where feasible.

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