

SECONDARY SUITES

WHAT IS A SECONDARY SUITE?

The National Building Code defines a **Secondary Suite** as a self-contained dwelling unit with a limited floor area which is located within a house or another building that contains only one other residential occupancy. The Secondary Suite and the Main Suite must constitute a single real estate entity. The requirements in this document are those prescribed by the National Building Code.

REQUIREMENTS

The following requirements apply to Secondary Suites and houses that contain Secondary Suites.

- **The total floor area** of all storeys of a Secondary Suite cannot be more than 80% of the total floor area of all storeys of the Main Suite, excluding the garage and any common spaces that serve both suites, or 80 m² (861 ft²), whichever is the lesser. (NSBC B.9.1.2.1.)
 - **Ceiling heights** in Secondary Suites shall be not less than 1.95 m (6' 5"). The height under beams and ductwork shall be not less than 1.85 m (6' 0"). (NSBC B.9.5.3.1.)
 - **Walls, floors and ceiling assemblies** in a house with a Secondary Suite that separate the suites from each other, from ancillary spaces and from common spaces in the house need not have a 45-minute Fire Resistance Rating (FRR) so long as they form a continuous **smoke-tight barrier*** that consists of a minimum of 12.7 mm (½") drywall installed:
 - On each side of the wall assemblies.
 - On the underside of floor/ceiling assemblies.
- * A **smoke-tight barrier** is achieved by sealing all joints and penetrations in the wall and ceiling assemblies to prevent the passage of vapors from one side of the assembly to the other. (NSBC B.9.10.9.14.(4))
- **Doors** installed in the smoke-tight barrier shall be solid-core wood doors at least 45 mm (1 ¾") thick, and shall be fitted with a self-closing device (NSBC B.9.10.9.3)
 - **Walls, floors and ceiling assemblies** in a house with a Secondary Suite that separate the suites from each other, from ancillary spaces and from common spaces in the house must have a **Sound Transmission Classification** (STC) of 43.
 - **Floor and ceiling assemblies** must have joist cavities filled with sound-absorbing material at least 150mm (6") thick and have resilient channel that is spaced either 400 mm (16") or 600 mm (24") on centre and at least 12.7mm (½") thick drywall installed on the ceiling side of the assembly.
 - **Wall assemblies** must have stud cavities filled with sound-absorbing material, have resilient channel that is spaced either 400 mm (16") or 600 mm (24") on centre installed on one side of the assembly, and must have at least 12.7mm (½") thick drywall on both sides.

Or wall, floor and ceiling assemblies must be constructed as an assembly that provides an STC of 43. (NSBC B.9.11.1.1.(2))

- **Smoke alarms** in a house with a Secondary Suite shall be hard wired with battery backup and must be installed:
 - On each storey.
 - In each bedroom.
 - In a location between each sleeping room and the remainder of the storey.
 - In the common areas shared between the Secondary and the Main Suite.

Smoke alarms in the Secondary Suite shall be interconnected with each other and those in the Main Suite so that activation of any one alarm causes all those in the house to sound. (NSBC B.9.10.19.)

- **A separate means of egress** is not required for dwelling units in a house with a Secondary Suite that have a shared egress facility.

However, where **a dwelling unit is located above another dwelling unit** in a house with a Secondary Suite, the upper dwelling unit must be provided with a second and separate means of egress where the egress door opens onto a passageway that has a FRR of less than 45 minutes, is served by a single exit stairway or ramp, and is located more than 1.5 m (5') above the adjacent ground level. (NSBC B.9.9.3.)

- **An exit** located in a house with a Secondary Suite shall be separated from the remainder of the building and protected by a smoke-tight barrier as described previously. (NSBC B.9.9.4.2.(2))
- **A self-contained Mechanical Ventilation System** must be installed in the Secondary Suite. No duct work of any type may be interconnected between the Secondary Suite and the Main Suite.
- **A non-ducted heating system** may be shared between the Secondary Suite and the Main Suite so long as there are separate controls for the heating system in each suite.
- **Fuel fired appliances** located in a Secondary Suite need not be enclosed by a 1-hour fire separation provided they are enclosed by a smoke-tight barrier as described previously. (NSBC B.9.10.10.4.(2))

PERMITS

A Building Permit must be obtained for any work required to construct a Secondary Suite. This includes work to convert an existing single unit dwelling into a house with a Secondary Suite, such as converting a basement into an apartment.

CONTACT US

Applicants may contact HRM to obtain the required Building Permit, or to speak to a Building Official for advice and clarification of any of the requirements outlined above by visiting the Customer Service Center located at **5251 Duke St, 3rd Floor, Suite 300, Duke Tower, Halifax**, by calling **311**, or by e:Mail at contactus@311.halifax.ca, to request a callback from a member of the Planning and Development team.