



SAFE SECONDARY SUITES

Information for home owners and tenants

Goal of this brochure

This brochure informs home owners and tenants about the main B.C. Building Code safety requirements for secondary suites. Furthermore it outlines Zoning Bylaw requirements for secondary suites. The goal is to make home owners and tenants aware about safety and other requirements for secondary suites. It is the home owners responsibility to make sure a secondary suite is safe, properly constructed and respects the District's bylaws.

What is a Secondary Suite?

A secondary suite is an additional dwelling unit within a single family house. In general, the presence of an additional kitchen means a house is considered to contain a secondary suite. Secondary suites have to be built according to the requirements of the B.C. Building Code.

The District's Zoning Bylaw defines a secondary suite as an *accessory dwelling unit* that:

- a) is located within a single family dwelling, and;
- b) has a total floor area of not more than 90 m² (968 sq ft) nor more than 40% of the total floor area of the building;
- c) is located in and part of a building which is a single real estate entity;
- d) is meeting all the applicable requirements from the B.C. Building Code;"

Fire protection measures

Fire Separations The secondary suite and the main dwelling are considered separate fire compartments. The secondary suite must be “compartmentalized” or separated from the main house by walls, floors and ceilings that have a fire rating of 45 minutes. In other words, the structure must be built so that it will take 45 minutes for a fire to burn from one suite into another. The fire separation can be reduced to a 30 minute rating if interconnected photo electric smoke alarms (CAN/ULC S531) are installed in each dwelling unit (B.C.B.C. 9.36.2.20). The fire separation requires no fire-resistance rating if the building is sprinklered.

Door assemblies installed in walls that require a fire resistance rating must have labels confirming a fire protection rating of 20 minutes and have rated self closing hinges.

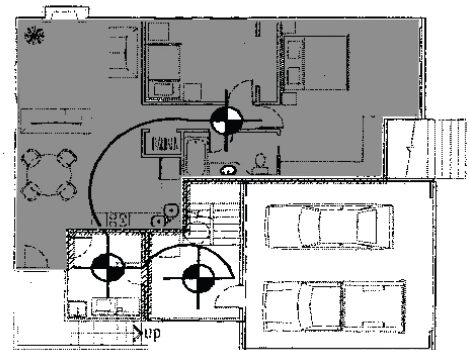
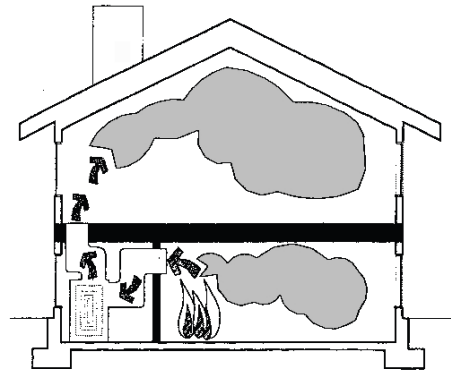
Pipes and Ducts Penetrating Fire Separations

Metal pipes and sheet metal air ducts may pass through fire-rated ceilings and walls between the suite and the main house but they must be tightly fitted. Ducts must be fitted with fire dampers if they are part of a forced air heating system along with a duct type smoke detector.

Smoke Alarms As a minimum, hard wired ionization type electric smoke alarms (CAN/ULC S531) must be installed in both the secondary suite and the main house.

A carbon monoxide detector is required in each dwelling unit if the building contains a garage or a fuel burning appliance.

Sprinklers Providing a sprinkler system throughout the entire building eliminates some of the foregoing requirements. Should you choose to exercise this option, please consult our Building Officials.



Safe exiting and other requirements

The basic principle of exit requirements is that people must be able to have two ways of getting out of the building in case of fire.

Doors The main house and the Secondary Suite must each have at least one swing door to the outside that is at least 1.98 m (6'-6") high and 0.81 m (2'-8") wide for fire exiting. The door may swing inward and is allowed to open into a shared corridor or exit stairway which, in turn, is provided a swing door to the outside.

Exit Corridors and Stairs Exit corridors, stairways, or exterior passageways shared between the main house and the secondary suite must be at least 0.86m (2'-10") wide. It must be possible to travel in opposite directions from either suite exit door to two separate exits.

Bedroom Windows A bedroom window must have a minimum clear height and width of 0.38 m (15 in) and a clear opening area of at least 0.35 sq m (3.75 sq ft). For the purposes of exiting in case of fire the window must be able to be opened from the inside.

Windows near an exit route Persons attempting to escape from one dwelling must not be exposed to fire emanating from the other dwelling.

Heating Systems Each room in the secondary suite must have winter heating. A forced air system in combination with a secondary suite has to be specifically customised to prevent smoke moving from one suite to another. Heating systems such as radiant hot water, electric baseboard, etc do not entail air exchange between suites and are therefore permitted without special measures.

Mechanical Ventilation The secondary suite must have at least one primary exhaust fan in the suite. This fan is usually located in the bathroom.

Plumbing

Plumbing fixtures must be in good condition and be marked with some evidence of CSA certification in accordance with Plumbing Code requirements. Non-conformance may result in inadequate fixture performance resulting in an unsanitary installation, compromising the health of the occupants.

Height of Rooms and Spaces The headroom clearance for secondary suites in an existing house must be a minimum of 2 m (6'7") from the floor to the underside of the ceiling. The minimum ceiling height must be maintained throughout the suite. In other

words, no beams or drops in the ceiling below that height can obstruct a person from walking from one room into another within the suite.

Parking, residency and other zoning bylaw requirements

The Zoning Bylaw regulates the use of a secondary suite and the land on which it is located. The following requirements apply:

One per single family dwelling - Only one secondary suite is permitted in any single family dwelling

Resident requirement - The owner of a single family dwelling containing a secondary suite shall be resident of either the principal dwelling unit or the secondary suite for a minimum of 9 months a year.

1 extra parking spot on site - For every single family dwelling with a secondary suite 3 parking spaces have to be provided on site. Each parking space has to be independently accessible, not depending on access over another parking space.

Home occupations - The Zoning Bylaw has general provisions that regulate all home occupations. In relation to a secondary suite the following requirements apply:

- A home occupation in a secondary suite shall be conducted only by residents of the secondary suite.
- Home occupations that attract customers or clients are not permitted on a lot that contain a secondary suite.
- Up to two home occupations are permitted on a lot.

Occupancy and registry - When construction of the secondary suite has been completed, you must call the District for a final inspection and occupancy permit. Use of a secondary suite is only allowed if an occupancy permit from the District of Sechelt has been issued.

Septic systems - For dwellings on septic systems a septic assessment is required before a secondary suite can be approved. The septic system will have to be equipped to process any additional sewage flows.