

# Final Report

## MLA Review Committee on Secondary Suites

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**Mr. Moe Amery, Chair**  
MLA Calgary East  
**Mr. Jon Lord, Chair**  
(to November/04)  
MLA Calgary Currie



# MLA Review Committee on Secondary Suites

## Executive Summary

Members of the Committee are:

- **Moe Amery, Chair**  
MLA Calgary East
- **Jon Lord, Chair**  
MLA Calgary Currie (until November/04)
- **Ed Gibbons**  
Alberta Urban Municipalities Association
- **Eugene Wauters**  
Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties
- **Avi Amir**  
Safety Codes Council
- **Chris Tye**  
Alberta Municipal Affairs
- **Ata Khan**  
Alberta Municipal Affairs
- **Gordon Hannon & Chinwe Okelu**  
Alberta Municipal Affairs

After consulting with Albertans and considering the issues, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

### Recommendation #1:

Standards for secondary suites should be developed for use in single-family homes to address the need for safety and affordability.

### Recommendation #2:

The government should establish province-wide standards for secondary suites under the Alberta Building and Fire Codes. Municipalities would continue to have the choice to determine when and where secondary suites will be permitted.

### Recommendation #3:

Standards for secondary suites should apply to both new and existing homes.

### Recommendation #4:

Standards for secondary suites should be developed to accommodate the goal of affordability, provided acceptable safety standards are in place.

### Recommendation #5:

The minimum height of rooms and spaces should be 1.95 m or 6'6".

### Recommendation #6:

Each bedroom should have at least one outside window that can be opened from the inside.

### Recommendation #7:

There should be no requirement for windows in rooms other than in the bedrooms.

### Recommendation #8:

To protect the suite from the spread of fire, fire protection for the walls and ceiling should be required.

**Recommendation #9:**

For the purpose of life safety, interconnected smoke alarms between the upper and lower suites should be required for every home with a secondary suite.

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**Recommendation #10:**

The furnace should be enclosed with fire separation walls and ceiling.

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**Recommendation #11:**

To enhance life safety, there should be a separate exit from the secondary suite to the outside.

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**Recommendation #12:**

Heating and ventilation systems should meet appropriate safety requirements that recognize the differences between new homes and existing homes.

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# Introduction

This report makes recommendations to achieve our vision for providing safety standards for secondary suites under the Alberta Building and Fire Codes.

**A secondary suite, or a "basement" or "accessory" suite is self-contained living unit, including a kitchen, bathroom and a separate exit created in a single-family home. Secondary suites are particularly common in major urban centres or in centres experiencing rapid population growth.**

Secondary suites are gaining more attention because these suites can be an important source of affordable rental and small-unit housing. Currently, most building codes, including the National Building Code, require secondary suites in single-family homes to be built according to apartment or duplex standards. In effect, building codes do not recognize the concept of a secondary suite as an affordable housing unit. To build or own a secondary suite that does not meet the apartment or duplex standard is a serious breach of the law in Alberta; however, the rapid growth of secondary suites occurring throughout the province, and indeed the country, is undeniable. Two provinces, Ontario and British Columbia, have already changed their building codes to recognize secondary suites.

It is important to recognize that safety codes in Alberta and throughout the world establish **minimum requirements**. This means that the standards support an acceptable level of safety for persons and property.

The proliferation of illegal secondary suites in Alberta as a result of housing shortages and changing social and family conditions renewed concerns over the safety and affordability of these suites. In 2002, Alberta Municipal Affairs conducted an online public consultation on proposed

safety standards for secondary suites as a new type of living unit under the Alberta Building and Fire Codes.

Although the consultation indicated support for recognizing secondary suites, several issues were raised concerning safety, affordability, municipal zoning and technical considerations. In addition, the majority of the responses came from professional code users and did not provide a clear indication of public and municipal support.

To gain a clearer picture of the issues and concerns for the public, municipalities, homeowners, renters, apartment owners, social organizations, elected officials, fire services, the building industry and many other interested groups, an MLA Committee was established including representation from government, municipal and industry members.

The Committee, chaired by Moe Amery, MLA for Calgary East, and Jon Lord, former MLA, Calgary Currie, held public and direct stakeholder meetings in representative areas throughout Alberta in 2003 and 2004. The Committee is also reviewing ongoing research at the national and provincial levels concerning the technical requirements in this area. This final report highlights the issues raised and makes recommendations to the Honourable Rob Renner, Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs, for secondary suite standards in Alberta.



## The Safety System

Alberta's safety system affects the homes we live in, the buildings we work in, the elevators that carry us to work, the switches that turn on our lights, the plumbing that brings us clean water to drink, the furnaces that heat our homes and the devices that save us from fire. For the most part, the safety system works so well that we often take our building safety, efficiency and affordability for granted. The environment in which we live is, in part, a product of the codes and standards that govern our safety system. Appropriate codes and standards provide Albertans and their families with confidence in the safety, and security, of their environment.

Alberta's safety system is administered under the *Safety Codes Act*. The Act regulates codes and standards for building, fire, plumbing, gas, electrical, private sewage systems, boilers and pressure vessels, elevating devices, amusement rides and ski lifts. It also provides access and protection for persons with disabilities in the built environment, and encourages the principles of barrier-free design in all buildings. When the Act was introduced in 1994, it brought about progressive and bold changes that altered the way the safety system was operated, managed, and administered. The Government of Alberta maintains the responsibility to coordinate and monitor the safe management of the safety system; however, recognizing that local authorities were in the best position to provide services and address local issues, municipalities, corporations and agencies were given extensive authority and responsibility for the delivery of safety services.

A key to the success of managing Alberta's safety system was the creation of the Safety Codes Council to oversee the development and administration of safety codes and standards. The Council consists of a broad range of industry, business, professional and

public representatives that work in partnership with the government to make Alberta a safe and healthy place to live. The Council's responsibilities include the certification and training of safety inspectors, the designation (known as accreditation) of municipalities, corporations and agencies that are qualified to provide safety services, and making recommendations on codes and standards to the Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs.



Changes to codes and standards are made through the Safety Codes Council, which then makes recommendations to the Minister. If the changes are substantial, the Minister will consult Albertans to ensure codes and standards remain appropriate. In this way, your safety system reflects the views of the public, industry and government to ensure that Alberta is ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

## Should standards for secondary suites be developed for use within a single-family home?

Secondary suites in single-family homes have gained attention because they provide an important source of affordable rental accommodation; however, the growing demand for more affordable or alternative living space is resulting in the construction of illegal suites without consideration for building and fire safety or the health of the occupants. The true number of illegal and unsafe secondary suites in Alberta is unknown, but municipalities and safety officials have identified the expansion of secondary suites as a major concern.



Healthy, safe and affordable housing alternatives are especially important for seniors, young families, students and those on low or fixed incomes who have limited choice in today's housing market. Currently, there are no standards in the Alberta Building Code for the construction of secondary suites unless they are built like duplexes or apartments, yet the Building Code requirements for duplexes and apartments, particularly for older single-family homes, are either very expensive or impossible to achieve without reconstructing the home.

To meet the existing requirements:

- Affordable secondary suites may not be built or existing suites may be forced to close; and
- The costs of meeting the current requirements would likely be passed onto the tenants, and this cost would reduce the affordability of the suite.

- If current requirements are not met, the alternative is that secondary suites will continue to be developed illegally and without consideration for building and fire safety.

### Recommendation #1

**Standards for secondary suites should be developed for use in single-family homes to address the need for safety and affordability.**

As a result of the large number of illegal suites with potential safety concerns and the over-extended housing market, standards for secondary suites should come into effect in the 2006 Alberta Building and Fire Codes. The overwhelming response in our consultations was that secondary suites would provide safe and affordable housing, and is long overdue as a legal housing option.

Other benefits included providing homeowners with additional source of income, alternative accommodation for families with aging parents or a "mortgage helper" for young couples, and encouraging greater population density in communities that might otherwise be in decline.

**Alberta is not alone in this initiative.** The provinces of British Columbia and Ontario have previously recognized the need for alternative housing and adopted standards for secondary suites. After conducting a survey of major North American urban centres, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has recommended that the National Building Code include requirements for secondary suites likely in 2010.



## How should secondary suites be regulated in Alberta?

The legalizing of secondary suites would require amendments to the Alberta Building and Fire Codes. These codes provide for the safe construction, renovation, demolition and maintenance of the building.

Although building and fire codes set the standards, permission to build secondary suites is a decision for the municipality. Municipalities may allow the development of secondary suites through land use bylaws within its municipal limits; however, the municipality must enforce the standards in the codes once secondary suites are permitted for use.



Accredited municipalities also have responsibility for the inspection of secondary suites and the enforcement of the standards. They are also responsible for determining the rules for community character and appearance such as parking, waste storage and access.

### Recommendation #2

**The government should establish province-wide standards for secondary suites under the Alberta Building and Fire Codes. Municipalities would continue to have the choice to determine when and where secondary suites will be permitted.**

When it comes to safety, Albertans expect to have uniform standards on which they can rely. This will provide Albertans with a uniform safety standard in every community, and it will recognize a need for alternative housing that is long overdue.

The consultations clearly indicated that the government is expected to establish safety standards while the municipalities set zoning requirements. Municipalities are in the best position to make decisions about their communities including issues of growth and zoning.

**The Committee recommends that municipalities continue to have the choice to determine when and where secondary suites will be permitted.**

## Should the current standards for apartments and duplexes continue to apply for new homes?

During our consultation, a number of questions were raised concerning the use of apartment and duplex standards. These more onerous standards are currently all that is available for secondary suite development. The current proposal from the Safety Codes Council would restrict the use of secondary suite standards to existing housing, while all new construction would use apartment/duplex standards. The reasoning for this proposal was that all apartment/duplex construction requirements could be planned for in a new home. On the other hand, an older home is often difficult and costly to renovate to these standards and should be treated differently.

The Committee faced strong opposition to restricting the use of secondary suite standards to existing housing. The majority of respondents from all sectors indicated that preventing the use of secondary suite standards for new homes would undermine the goal of developing more affordable housing. There were also serious concerns about the confusion for safety officials and homeowners if there were different standards for new and existing homes.

Albertans clearly stated during the consultation that they should have the choice to build either to an apartment/duplex standard or to a secondary suite standard, regardless of when the home was built.

### Recommendation #3

**Standards for secondary suites should apply to both new and existing homes.**

Our decision is based on widespread public support for a uniform standard, the need to provide more affordable housing in new markets, and the concerns of municipal and safety officials for a common-sense approach.

A single standard provides a more workable safety system for municipalities to inspect and enforce. At the same time, the public has an expectation that rules for constructing their home will be straightforward and consistent.

The public's compliance with law is in part based on the public's belief in the credibility of the law. Provided minimum safety conditions are in place, we believe a uniform and common-sense approach is fundamental to the successful development of secondary suites.

## What requirements would provide an acceptable balance of safety and affordability?

The most important objective in developing standards for secondary suites is the safety of Albertans. Proposed standards for several features such as kitchen ventilation, washrooms, height and spacing of stair rails, size of exit doors and so forth would be the same as those requirements for apartments and duplexes.



Research of other Canadian and foreign jurisdictions permitting secondary suites, along with expert professional reviews by building and fire technical advisors, highlighted eight prominent technical requirements that would meet safety needs and address affordability concerns. These standards would set the benchmark or the minimum requirement enforceable by municipalities and safety inspectors. Homeowners would also be permitted to exceed these requirements should they choose to do so.

These eight proposed requirements, along with other issues and concerns, were highlighted for discussion with the public, municipalities and industry during our consultations throughout Alberta. As the discussions evoked many strongly held opinions and recommendations, we felt that each of the eight proposals should be considered as separate issues and recommended independently.

### Recommendation #4

**Standards for secondary suites should be developed to accommodate the goal of affordability, provided acceptable safety standards are in place.**

An important theme throughout the consultation was a need to provide standards that were economically feasible. Stakeholders indicated throughout the consultation that if standards for secondary suites were developed without including the principle of affordability, the number of illegal and unsafe suites would increase to unmanageable levels.

Affordable housing, such as secondary suites, has the potential to act as a link in the chain to pull Albertans out from difficult living conditions. For those persons who have the means to pay for suites but have not been able to find available housing, secondary suites provide a safe and improved housing option. As a result, more low-income housing is made available for those persons with no home at all. By opening up more affordable housing options, we improve conditions for all Albertans.

## The appropriate height of rooms and spaces

The Alberta Building Code currently allows for a minimum height of rooms and spaces in unfinished basements of 1.95 metres or 6' 6". This ceiling height would make it feasible for the majority of existing homes to be adapted for secondary suites and allow unhindered activity except for the tallest of individuals.

Newly built homes would almost certainly have higher basement ceilings in keeping with current construction practices.



### Recommendation #5

**The minimum height of rooms and spaces should be 1.95 m or 6'6".**

The majority of the public and other respondents supported this proposal. No significant issues were raised about this proposal.

This proposal may impose a limitation on some very old homes for developing secondary suites, but the majority of homes would be suitable. In many new homes, 2.4 m or 8' is the standard ceiling height.

## Minimum size of bedroom windows

Each bedroom shall have at least one outside window that can be opened from the inside. The window shall provide an unobstructed opening of at least 0.35 square metres or 3.75 square feet with no dimension less than 380 mm or 15 inches.

It is necessary to have a certain size of window in each bedroom of a secondary suite for fire escape or access by fire services for rescue. The same requirement applies to bedrooms in an apartment or single-family home.

A clear opening of .35 square metres is sufficient for a normal person to exit or be pulled out of the room by fire and emergency services.



### Recommendation #6

**Each bedroom should have at least one outside window that can be opened from the inside.**

We support this technical requirement and there was unanimous support from the public and stakeholders. Window dimensions are a significant safety requirement that would allow occupants to use the window as an escape route in the event of fire.

Windows of sufficient size also allow firefighters and other emergency professionals to pull an occupant out of the room in the event he or she cannot escape independently.



## Window requirements other than bedroom windows

We presented Albertans with a standard requirement for window space other than in the bedrooms to be a minimum of 10 per cent of the living space. For secondary suites, this would generally apply to the living and dining rooms, which may often simply be one room.

The reason for this requirement has traditionally been based on enhancing quality of life by providing natural light and the ability to look outside. This requirement is not related to safety of the individual or protection of property.

We encountered strong opposition to this requirement from both the public and stakeholders. They felt this proposal is impractical to construct in existing homes, and it is not a safety issue.



The response also indicated that although Albertans supported window space in the bedrooms for fire escape and lighting quality, the majority did not see the value for a required amount of window space in living and dining rooms of secondary suites. During public meetings, several comments were made to the effect that there is very little light and no view to be seen from small basement windows.

### Recommendation #7

**There should be no requirement for windows in rooms other than in the bedrooms.**

This proposal is not related to safety, and respondents were overwhelmingly opposed to a window space requirement. The Committee recommends that the only window space requirement be in the bedrooms, and builders and owners may determine whether further window space is needed in secondary suites.

With a full basement below grade, most basement windows would not meet the 10 per cent room area requirement and could result in major renovations to the home to accommodate this feature.

It should also be noted that this requirement for 10 per cent window space has been removed from the 2005 National Building Code, which is the basis for the upcoming edition of the Alberta Building Code.

## Fire protection

We proposed that secondary suites shall be separated from the main dwelling units of the home by walls and a ceiling that have an acceptable fire protection rating using 12.5-millimetre or ½-inch thick gypsum board. The intent is to isolate the secondary suite from the spread of fire from and to the upper level of the home. The gypsum board finish with supports will provide adequate fire protection to allow the occupants of the home sufficient time to evacuate safely before the fire spreads from one unit to another.



### Recommendation #8

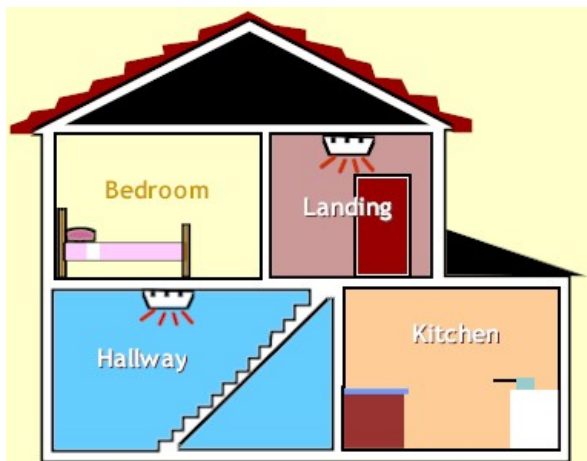
**To protect the suite from the spread of fire, fire protection for the walls and ceiling should be required.**

This proposal was strongly supported particularly with the adoption of the smoke alarm requirements. As a significant safety requirement, this proposal is necessary to achieve acceptable safety conditions.

Fire services indicated that fire protection times may vary depending on the construction of the home or flame spread in other areas; however, they also agreed that this was an appropriate and acceptable measure, and that it is a significant improvement to the current substandard fire protection in illegal secondary suites.

## Interconnected smoke alarms

The amount of lives saved through the installation of smoke alarms in the home has been well documented throughout North America. A research study by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation found that between 1980 and 1999, the rates of fire incidence, injuries, property damage and death have dropped by 75 per cent. The requirements for smoke alarms and accompanying public education “constitute the single most determining factor” for this dramatic change. Early warning of fire is especially important when the owner has tenants.



A fundamental goal of the Alberta Building and Fire Codes is the security of life and protection from injury. As such, the Committee proposed the installation of interconnected smoke alarms between the upper and lower suites. Each bedroom in a secondary suite would be protected by a smoke alarm within 5 metres or 16'3" of the bedroom or inside the bedroom itself.

### Recommendation #9

**For the purpose of life safety, interconnected smoke alarms between the upper and lower suites should be required for every home with a secondary suite.**

We consider this proposal a foundation for addressing life safety concerns with secondary suites. Our feelings on this proposal were strongly echoed by all consulted, and this demonstrates a strong commitment to common sense safety measures by Albertans.

Smoke alarms shall be required to be installed within 5 metres or 16' 3" of the bedroom door bedroom or in the bedroom itself. The key additional safety requirement is the interconnection or "hard-wired" connection between the smoke alarms in the lower or basement suites to the upper or main level suites. This additional safety factor becomes critical if the fire occurs at night when the occupants are sleeping.

Installation costs were not considered significant by the public compared to the added life safety value. Requiring the system to be hard-wired further reduces the safety risk by eliminating the problem of battery replacement.

We also recommend that the public be encouraged to enhance smoke alarm protection throughout their homes beyond the minimum requirements. Public communication of these standards should include the promotion of smoke alarm protection.



## Furnace room fire protection

Fire hazards are the most prominent safety risk for secondary suites, particularly those suites that have been built without consideration for building and fire standards. We were impressed with the concern that Albertans showed for safety requirements, and this proposal was a direct response from public and stakeholder recommendations. The Committee felt obligated to represent the people's views, and added this proposal to its consultations in 2004.

A furnace or furnaces in a secondary suite shall be enclosed in a room, with both sides of the furnace wall given acceptable fire protection rating by 12.5-millimetre or ½-inch thick gypsum board.



### Recommendation #10

**The furnace should be enclosed with fire separation walls and ceiling.**

There was strong support for adopting this requirement by the public and stakeholders. We considered this proposal to be an excellent example of why public consultations are so important to the appropriate development of codes and standards.

Similar to **Recommendation #8**, it is beneficial for safety reasons to enclose a furnace or furnaces in a separate room with gypsum board.

## Independent exit from the suite

The main purpose of this proposal is to provide a separate exit for the occupants of a secondary suite from the home.

The requirement is an essential safety feature to provide an alternate means of evacuating the home in the event of fire or other emergency. However, the consultation also indicated that owners and tenants had concerns about privacy and security. An alternate doorway that leads directly to the outside or a doorway to a common hall or vestibule to the outside would address this concern.



During the consultation, the response was predominantly in favour of this requirement for all new homes or newly constructed basements. It was clear that the public and stakeholders recognized the safety importance of a separate and independent exit from a secondary suite for existing homes as well.

### Recommendation #11

**To enhance life safety, there should be a separate exit from the secondary suite to the outside.**

Given the safety issues involved, this proposal had to put minimum safety features ahead of affordability. We feel obligated to recommend that a separate exit from the suite be required.

As noted, the public strongly supported separate exits for new homes. An independent exit also provides additional privacy and security for owner and tenants. There were several examples where the owner actually sealed off a doorway that led into the owner's space and installed a separate doorway to ensure privacy.

If the exit from a secondary suite is only provided through the main floor with no fire separation, and if the fire occurs on the main floor, the occupants of the basement suite are very likely to become trapped. Although there is the additional exit from the bedroom windows, this is not sufficient as a primary exit.

## Independent heating and ventilation systems

Under the apartment/duplex standards, heating or ventilation duct systems, such as a gas furnace, are not permitted to interconnect separate dwelling units in a home. This means that for a home with a secondary suite, two separate heating and ventilation systems would be required to meet the Alberta Building Code.

Separate heating and ventilation systems for multiple living units have been a requirement of national and provincial safety codes for many decades. The intent is to protect against death or injury and maintain an acceptable indoor air quality. Installing a separate system will limit the spread of smoke through the air duct system in the event of a fire, provide accessible heating control and adequate distribution of heat for the occupants, and restrict the circulation of odours and germs.

The majority of municipalities, stakeholders and the public were strongly against this proposal particularly concerning existing homes. To a lesser degree, there was also opposition to the requirement for new construction, but many respondents acknowledged a new home could be planned in advance for a separate system.

### EXISTING HOMES

A number of homeowners considering the development of a secondary suite own older homes that were often built to smaller dimensions compared to the standard homes of today. Installing a second heating and ducting system in these homes would likely be costly and damaging to the home. Even in a larger home, significant labour and renovation costs may be necessary to accommodate changes to the system. Respondents to the Committee considered the

installation of a second heating and ventilation system impractical. The Committee heard from municipal authorities and the general public that imposing a requirement for a secondary heating/ventilation system would simply intensify the development of illegal suites.

We took these concerns very seriously and embarked upon further research in this area. Basic engineering and heating practices do support the importance of a secondary ventilation system. It is also true that there are no scientific studies relating to smoke distribution from one living unit to another within a single family home. Preliminary experiments in this area, conducted by an engineering consulting firm, indicate that smoke distribution is very rapid through a common duct or ventilation system. This experimental research also indicates that an effective interconnected smoke alarm system will provide sufficient early warning to allow the occupants to escape the home. Even though this research is not yet complete, the indications are that a more rigorous testing environment will likely confirm the preliminary findings.



The Fire Technical Council, a sub-council of the Safety Codes Council, has examined this issue and concluded that houses with existing

secondary suites should not be required under the Alberta Fire Code to install a separate heating and ventilation system. Many homeowners would simply not comply or be unable to comply with this requirement. Other safety measures proposed for secondary suites, particularly interconnected smoke alarms, will improve the current conditions of illegal secondary suites to an acceptable safety level. Examples of homes that would be accepted with a single heating/ventilation system would include homes with finished basements or homes already containing a secondary suite.

The Committee also heard presentations from the heating industry about various options for heating/ventilation systems and associated issues for homeowners and tenants. Two major issues were identified for the heating of secondary suites: control and distribution of heat, and indoor air quality. In practice, many homeowners and tenants are not satisfied with a shared or joint heating/ventilation system in the home. Owners will often request an additional heating system or separate ducting to resolve complaints by tenants or their own families of poor ventilation or insufficient heating. For quality-of-life reasons, the practice of simply leaving a ventilation system in place with no adjustments for the secondary suite is not acceptable to owners or tenants. Other respondents indicated that control over the heated environment in the basement is preferable.

Contrary to the belief that this is solely a matter of choosing between one or two large furnaces, the Committee heard from the heating industry of a variety of ways to provide control and distribution of heat in suites. The lowest cost is to supplement the existing heating system with another source, such as a wall furnace or space heater. Another reasonably economic option is to use a single furnace with a set of dampers and controls to direct the hot air to the suites separately. Each suite would have its own thermostat capable of turning on the furnace to supply heat only to that suite. There is a more expensive option of adding a second smaller furnace, or using alternative sources

such as radiant hot water heating system. Nevertheless, the system that makes the most sense to manage heat control and indoor air quality is the two-furnace system.



## NEW HOMES

Owners with unfinished basements or with homes under construction who are intending to convert the space for secondary suites would be required to have an independent ventilation system for both suites under the Alberta Building Code. The building code regulates all new construction, and in the case of new construction the Building Technical Council, a sub-council of the Safety Codes Council, recommended that a separate heating and ventilation system be required. The alternative heating/ventilation sources discussed for use in existing suites would be applicable to new homes or new construction as well, as long as acceptable separate ventilation for the secondary suite was available.

Although a joint ventilation system can be made safe by using other safety features, it is not the *preferable minimum standard* that professionals, including building and fire safety officials, would consider as the benchmark for housing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Considering the life safety importance of proper air ventilation, the Council felt that for new construction, homes should maintain better minimum conditions for heating control and indoor air quality. New homes are, in general, designed with basements that are more conducive for a secondary heating system, particularly if planned for in the construction stage.



## Recommendation #12

**Heating and ventilation systems should meet appropriate safety requirements that recognize the differences between new homes and existing homes.**

**For existing homes with a pre-existing secondary suite, a single heating and ventilation system is recommended for adoption under the Alberta Fire Code.**

**For new homes or new construction, a separate heating and ventilation system for the secondary suite is recommended for adoption under the Alberta Building Code.**

The primary concern of the public appeared to be with renovations to accommodate separate heating/ventilation for existing homes with a finished or partially finished basement. It is with these homes that the cost impact is the greatest, while the owners may have the least resources available.

### NEW HOMES

Independent heating and ventilation has been held as a standard to ensure safe air circulation among building and fire experts for decades. We consider the use of this standard for new homes an appropriate safety standard for future housing construction. The Committee is mindful of the affordability arguments, but we also acknowledge that there are a variety of economically reasonable alternatives to supplement heating and indoor air quality.

The need to establish a standard that improves the quality of life for future families, low-income earners, seniors and other occupants of secondary

suites should be paramount. Some municipalities have already gone ahead with requiring this standard for designated homes with secondary suites in new subdivisions, and no issues or complaints have been raised. Prospective owners of new homes will also have the choice to construct secondary suites as part of the planning process of the new home and benefit from a substantial cost savings, or develop a secondary suite at a later date.

### EXISTING HOMES

Building and fire officials, including the Fire Technical Council of the Safety Codes Council, have acknowledged that for existing homes with suites, the installation of interconnected smoke alarms and other safety proposals for secondary suites provides a reasonable and acceptable level of safety.

We agree with this difference for existing homes, and we support the majority of respondents in their view that a single heating/ventilation system appropriately balances safety and affordability for existing homes. This recommendation also removes the single greatest cost impact for owners of existing homes. We encourage owners to investigate the use of heating options with their local heating services company in order to minimize renovations and lower costs.

## Concluding Comments

The recommendations in this report were made possible by the participation and insight of Albertans from across the province. The Committee would like to thank all municipalities, organizations and members of the public who participated in the consultation or submitted comments to the Committee. We believe that this report responds to the concerns identified during the consultation, while maintaining an appropriate balance of safety and affordability for Albertans. To offer your views about these recommendations or obtain additional copies of the report, please contact:

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If you are calling long distance, please dial **310-0000** toll-free anywhere inside Alberta.

Thank you for your participation and support.

## Consultations

### Public Meetings

Brooks - November 2003  
Calgary - January 2004  
Canmore - January 2004  
Edmonton - January 2004  
Grande Prairie - October 2003  
Lethbridge - November 2003  
Medicine Hat - January 2004  
Red Deer - January 2004

### Meetings with City Councils and Safety Officials (Building and Fire Officials)

Brooks - November 2003  
Calgary - January 2004  
Canmore - January 2004  
Edmonton - January 2004  
Fort McMurray - October 2003  
Grande Prairie - October 2003  
Lethbridge - November 2003  
Medicine Hat - January 2004  
Red Deer - January 2004

### Selected Alberta Stakeholders

Consultation (March 29, 2004)

### Ghost Lake Smoke Distribution

**Investigations**, presentation by *Morrison  
Hershfield Limited* (January 24, 2005)

**Heating & Ventilation: Issues and  
Practice, an Industry Perspective**, by  
the *Service Experts* (Rob's Plumbing –  
Heating – Air – Drain Cleaning) (Albertan  
Heating) (February 22, 2005)

**Online Government of Alberta Public  
Consultation on Proposed Standards  
for Secondary Suites** (March/April 2002)

## List of Submissions and Contacts

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## Resources

### Documents:

**Accessory Suite Report** – Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation (1999)

**Affordable Housing in Canada: In Search of a New Paradigm.** TD Economics, Discussion Paper, June 17, 2003. TD Bank Financial Group.

**An Evaluation of Secondary Suite Regulatory Implementation Methods in Low-Density Residential Districts (1999)** by Adam Legge.

**Apartments in Houses Municipal Guide (1994)**

**British Columbia Building Code**

**British Columbia Fire Code**

**City of Toronto, By-Law No. 493-2000 (OMB).** "To enact zoning by-law amendments respecting secondary suites"

**Final Report – Affordability and Secondary Suites – Expanding Housing Choice (1997)** Choice Today (A.C.T.) Streamlined Approval Process Project  
Prepared for City of St. Albert, Town of Morinville, Town of Gibbons, Town of Devon

**Fire Experience, Smoke Alarms and Sprinklers in Canadian Houses: CMHC Research to 2005.** Research Highlight, April 2005, Technical Series 05-107

**Motion 512, May 23, 2000—Bonnie Laing, MLA Calgary-Bow.**

"Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Government to encourage municipal governments to investigate ways of adding low-cost housing units through changes in zoning bylaws to allow alternate housing units such as secondary suites and room-and-board housing in residential neighbourhoods."

**Ontario Building Code**

**Ontario Fire Code**

**Secondary Suites, An Affordable Housing Choice for British Columbians: – A Summary of Local Government Practices** Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Housing, Recreation and Consumer Services, 1995)

### **Jurisdictions Researched:**

Province of Ontario  
Province of British Columbia  
Municipality of Delta, B.C., Canada  
North Vancouver, B.C., Canada  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada  
Washington State, U.S.A.  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.  
Seattle, Oregon, U.S.A.  
New Westminster, B.C., Canada  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
London, Ontario, Canada  
North York, Ontario, Canada

Other jurisdictions consulted included Germany, England, Australia, New Zealand, Spain and Portugal.