

Finishing the basement to code minimum

This handout is to assist builders in finishing basements to a point that will satisfy the code requirements and yet allow the owner to continue to “finish” the basement at a pace that may be easier on their time constraints and their finances.

The building code is a minimum standard. Many of the things that we generally view as finished is actually well above the requirements of the building codes. The following is what is required by the code to finish a basement. This level of completion will provide enough to satisfy all code requirements that come into play as if the wall coverings were installed.

- Framing:** All wall framing, all soffits, furr down and vertical chases need to be complete. All fire blocking at all soffits, furr down and vertical chases and other concealed spaces such as between the foundation and a framed perimeter wall. Bearing walls will be required to have the mid-span blocking as in unfinished basements.
- Mechanical:** All heat runs to the various rooms will need to be completed. If these are in the ceiling no heat register is required for final. Return air ducts or plenums will need to be completed. Typically the grill frame is installed on wall framing.
- Plumbing:** Typically the drain piping is complete. However all drain fixtures need the proper vent piping complete. Water distribution piping that would be concealed within a wall that is covered will need to be complete i.e. lines run and stubbed into the room space. All nail plating of plumbing that may be damaged by drywall fastening would need to be in place.
- Electrical:** Each room identified as a bedroom will need to have a smoke detector. Bedrooms are typically identifiable by their size, the presence of a closet and a window which can be used for egress. It is recommended but not required that every room with windows large enough for egress be equipped with a smoke detector. Any bathrooms that do not have a window to the exterior will need to have a fan installed which extends to the outside. All outlets must be completed. Outlets in bedrooms must be AFCI protected. The wiring of the outlets will require careful placement of the wires to protect them from physical damage. Protection can be achieved by drywall being installed on the walls OR by following the attached details to avoid the need for drywall. All electrical receptacles, lights, switches, and detectors need to be complete.
- Insulation:** The perimeter exterior walls will need to be insulated.

The Building code does not require wall finishes. Finishes are installed to protect plumbing and electrical work from being damaged and to provide an aesthetically pleasing environment to work and live. It is possible to protect without “finishing.”