

# ICC TRI-CHAPTER UNIFORM CODE COMMITTEE (TUCC)



**POLICY NUMBER:** 3

**APPROVAL DATE:** April 3, 2008

**SUBJECT:** R-3 Occupancy – New openings/enlargement of existing openings in existing exterior walls

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*This guideline is developed by the Tri-chapter Uniform Code Committee and is intended to enhance regional consistency in application and enforcement of the Building Code. Please verify acceptance of this guideline with your local building department prior to its application.*

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**CODE REFERENCE (S):**

2007 CBC - Table 704.8, Chapter 34, Sections 3403 and 3403.1

**ISSUE (S):**

The building code has historically permitted detached, single family (R-3) occupancy to have “unprotected openings” in exterior walls located 3 feet or more from the property line. 2007 CBC regulates openings when the exterior wall is less than 5 feet from the property line.

The question is how to regulate new window/door openings in existing walls, which are less than 5 feet from property line.

**GUIDELINE/  
INTERPRETATION:**

**WHAT IS AN OPENING?**

Openings are not specifically defined in the 2007 CBC. However, Section 704.8 states; “The maximum area of unprotected or protected openings permitted in an exterior wall in any story shall not exceed the values set forth in Table 704.8.”

The definition of story (2007 CBC, Ch.2) states; “The portion of a building included between the upper surface of a floor and the upper surface of the floor or roof next above. It is measured as the vertical distance from top to top of two successive tiers of beams or finished floor surfaces and, for the topmost story, from the top of the floor finish to the top of the ceiling joists, or where there is not a ceiling, to the top of the roof rafters.”

Therefore, all openings from the first floor level and above should be considered in calculating the maximum allowable openings. Under floor ventilation openings need not be considered in calculating the maximum allowable percentage.

Chapter 34, Section 3403, regulates Additions, Alterations and Repairs. This new or enlarged opening is an alteration by definition (any construction or renovation to an existing structure other than repair or addition), and per Section 3403.1, this new work “shall comply with the requirements of the code for new construction.”

Per Table 704.8 openings are not permitted if it is not more than 3 feet from property line. Greater than 3 feet to 5 feet from property line, the existing and new opening square footage shall not exceed 25% of the exterior wall in any story and shall be allowed to be unprotected (based on the interpretation of footnote “c” in Table 704.8 regarding the maximum 25% allowable openings).

Existing wall construction shall be allowed to remain as “non-rated”. The wall is existing and therefore, not subject to current code provisions for “new work” (based on Section 3403.1). New openings and enlarged openings are deemed an alteration and therefore, shall comply with the requirements for new construction.