



Frequently Asked Questions About Sunrooms

What is the definition of a sunroom?

Per the 2012 International Residential Code, a sunroom is “a one-story structure attached to a dwelling with a glazing area in excess of 40 percent of the gross area of the structure’s exterior walls and roof.” The term “sunroom” can, therefore, be used to describe patio rooms, conservatories, porch enclosures, solariums and the like.

Do sunrooms need to meet the building codes?

Yes. All structures need to meet the building code adopted by the local municipality.

Are sunrooms required to meet the energy code?

Yes, all sunrooms are required to meet the codes. However, the building and energy codes have varying levels for requirements that are based on the level of complexity of the sunroom. Sunrooms are defined using five categories that describe the performance characteristics for things such as air and water leakage resistance as well as energy performance. Category I, II and III sunrooms do not have a heating or cooling system installed, and are therefore exempt from the insulation and air leakage requirements of the energy code. Category IV sunrooms do contain a heating and/or cooling system, but the existing house doors and windows are left in place, which “thermally isolates” the sunroom from the home. These “thermally isolated” sunrooms have special requirements that are listed in the energy code, which are known as the thermally isolated sunroom requirements. Category V sunrooms are essentially the same as a regular room addition on a home, and are not required to be thermally isolated from the rest of the home. Category V sunrooms are therefore subject to the same requirements as any other addition in the energy codes.

What is the definition of a thermally isolated sunroom?

A sunroom in which the heating and cooling of the sunroom space is controlled as a separate zone or with separate equipment from the host structure space. The adjacent wall between these two spaces must meet the building thermal envelope requirements of the code.



Is there a standard for sunroom design?

AAMA/NPEA/NSA 2100-11 is the specification for sunrooms. It is currently being used in the Florida Building Code as a reference to help building officials, contractors, and consumers understand the different options available in the sunroom market and determine how each type will need to meet the different building code requirements.

Do I need a building permit to build a sunroom?

Most jurisdictions will require some type of permit for a sunroom. The extent to which the permit is required may depend on the category of sunroom being installed. Permit requirements are set at the local level, so the best way to determine if you need a permit is to contact your city or county. They will also be able to give you the details regarding what is needed to obtain the permit (drawings, calculations, pictures, etc.) See AAMA/NPEA/NSA 2100-11 for the sunroom category definitions.

Can you build a sunroom on a deck?

Yes. However, it is typical that the deck will need to be upgraded with additional beams, posts, and/or footings to have the strength to withstand the additional weight and loads created by the new sunroom. Contact a local structural engineer to find out whether your existing deck is suitable. In some situations it may be more cost effective to build a new deck, especially if the existing deck is older or has deteriorated.

Are continuous footings required for a sunroom?

Footings are required to extend down to the frost line depth. If the area in which the sunroom is built does not have a frost depth, then footings may only be required as structurally needed. Contact your local building department to find out if the local code specifies a frost line depth or has a specific requirement for footings.

Is there a maximum amount of glass that may be installed in a sunroom?

As long as the structure is shown to be structurally sound, there are currently no limits set by the codes to state a maximum percentage of glass.

What are the electrical requirements for a sunroom?

The electrical requirements for a sunroom will depend on the category of sunroom. Sunroom categories I through IV only require that there be an exterior light with a switch at each door to the exterior. Other electrical circuits such as interior lights, ceiling fans and receptacles (outlets) are permitted but not required. When installed, electrical circuits must be Ground-Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) protected. Category V sunrooms (room additions) require the exterior light and switch at each exterior door as before, but also require outlets 6-feet from each door and 12-feet maximum spacing between outlets.

1300 Sumner Avenue • Cleveland, Ohio 44115
Telephone: 216-241-7333 • Fax: 216-241-0105
info@nationalsunroom.org • www.nationalsunroom.org