

Outdoor basement stairs -- CAUTION!

Last Updated: Tuesday, September 7th, 2021, Created: Sunday, January 14th, 2001

Can I cut in a door where the basement window is presently?

Ed and Shirley from Dundas, Ontario want to put a door into the basement right where there is presently a window. Can they do it?

If the door is the same width as the window, there will be no structural problems above. If you make the door wider than the window, then you must add some structural support over the hole. Check with a contractor or structural engineer on details if you do want to increase the width of the hole.

Outdoor basement stairs are often subject to frost problems.

I really don't like outside entrances into basements in a cold climate for a number of reasons. It is hard to prevent water problems because even if you do put a drain in the bottom of the stair well which goes down to the door, it may be frozen the day it rains, and water will flow into the basement under the door. Also, the entire step and retaining wall structure is subject to serious freezing problems.

The main problem is that the basement floor and footing were previously protected from frost by about 4 feet of soil. Now the cold starts at the basement floor level and goes down from there, possibly creating frost conditions under the footings and the basement floor itself and certainly under the steps out of the basement. This can be controlled by installing about 2 inches of foam insulation under the bottom of the entry well, under the steps all the way up, vertically on the soil side of the retaining wall, and even skirted out into the yard.

Keywords:

Structure, Doors, Windows, Stairs, Insulation, Basement, Frost