

NSA Sunroom Datasheet #101

Frequently Asked Questions About Sunrooms

What is the definition of a sunroom?

Per the 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 structures such as patio rooms, conservatories, porch enclosures, and solariums.

Do sunrooms need to meet the building codes?

Yes. All structures need to meet building codes adopted by municipalities.

Are sunrooms required to meet the energy code?

Sunrooms that are regulated by heating and/or cooling systems are required to meet the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC). However, the IECC has varying levels for requirements that are based on the level of complexity of the sunroom.

Sunrooms are defined using five categories that describe performance characteristics 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 insulation and air leakage requirements. Category IV sunrooms contain their own heating and/or cooling systems, 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 in the IECC, 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 IECC.

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 IECC.

Is there a standard for sunroom design?

Yes. AAMA/NPEA/NSA 2100, Specifications for Sunrooms, is the standard for sunrooms. It is 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. The standard is also referenced in the International Residential Code (IRC.)

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 for the sunroom category definitions.

Can you build a sunroom on a deck?

Yes. However, the deck will typically 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 on a concrete patio?

Yes, where 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?

No. 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, and also require outlets 6-feet from each door and 12-foot maximum spacing between outlets.