

# BC BUILDING CODE INTERPRETATION COMMITTEE

A joint committee with members representing  
**AIBC, EGBC, BOABC**

**File No: 18-0212**

**INTERPRETATION**

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Interpretation Date: January 17, 2023

Building Code Edition: BC Building Code 2018

Subject: Continuous Illumination for Emergency Lighting

Keywords: Emergency Lighting

Building Code Reference(s): 3.2.7.3

## Question:

Is emergency lighting required to continuously illuminate the areas that require emergency lighting?

Yes.

Sentence 3.2.7.3.(1) lists the locations that require emergency lighting, and requires a minimum average emergency lighting level of 10 lx at floor or tread level in those locations. Sentence 3.2.7.3.(3) requires minimum illumination value (i.e. the minimum spot illumination) to be 1 lx.

The BCBC does not address whether the emergency lighting can be automatically controlled and activated, such as by motion sensors. However, emergency lighting is intended for a relatively short duration, of 30 min, 1 h or 2 h depending on the building. Emergency lighting facilitates emergency activities such as evacuation of a building, and it is not intended for most normal building activities. During an emergency there may be other factors that affect motion sensors, such as smoke or fallen objects that block the field of view of a sensor. Therefore, it is interpreted that emergency lighting is required to continuously illuminate the areas where emergency lighting is required, for the intended time duration.

Note that, due to the prevalence of LED lighting which uses less power than traditional lighting, it has become common for most lighting circuits in some buildings to be connected to emergency power. This results in emergency lighting levels that may be much higher than the minimum BCBC requirement. In those situations, only the lighting needed to provide the minimum required emergency illumination must be continuous.



Patrick Shek, P.Eng., CP, FEC, Committee Chair

The views expressed are the consensus of the joint committee with members representing AIBC, EGBC and BOABC, which form the BC Building Code Interpretation Committee. The Building and Safety Standards Branch, Province of BC and the City of Vancouver participate in the committee's proceedings with respect to interpretations of the BC Building Code. The purpose of the committee is to encourage uniform province wide interpretation of the BC Building Code. These views should not be considered as the official interpretation of legislated requirements based on the BC Building Code, as final responsibility for an interpretation rests with the local *Authority Having Jurisdiction*. The views of the joint committee should not be construed as legal advice.

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Sentence 3.2.7.3.(1) states that emergency lighting “shall be provided”. This does not include any provision for the emergency lighting not to be provided or for the emergency lighting levels to be reduced in the locations where they are required.

For normal (non-emergency) lighting, Sentence 3.2.7.1.(1) requires that the specified locations “shall be equipped to provide” the required illumination. This does not require the minimum normal lighting levels to be provided at all times. Subject to agreement from the authority having jurisdiction, motion sensors could be used to control the required normal lighting levels.



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