


BC BUILDING CODE INTERPRETATION COMMITTEE

A joint committee with members representing
AIBC, EGBC, BOABC

File No: 24-0131

INTERPRETATION

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Interpretation Date:	March 10, 2026
Building Code Edition:	BC Building Code 2024
Subject:	Laterally Unsupported Foundation Walls Below Openings
Keywords:	Laterally, unsupported, foundation, openings
Building Code Reference(s):	9.15.4.2., Table 9.15.4.2.-A, 9.15.4.3.(3)
Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. If a solid unreinforced concrete foundation wall, which is laterally unsupported at the top; < 3 m. high; and retains soil which is not more than the height indicated in Column 3 of Table 9.15.4.2.-A, can this wall be provided with opening without reinforcement around the opening?2. If a solid unreinforced concrete foundation wall, which is laterally supported at the top; < 3 m. high; and retains soil which is not more than the height indicated in Columns 4, 5 or 6 of Table 9.15.4.2.-A, can this wall be provided with openings without reinforcement around the opening when the wall beneath the openings retains soil which is not more than the height indicated in Column 3 of Table 9.15.4.2.-A?	
Interpretation: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Yes. <p>If the wall around the opening is not reinforced to withstand earth pressure, the portion of the foundation wall beneath the opening shall be considered laterally unsupported as per Sentence 9.15.4.3.(3).</p> <p>Since the foundation wall in question is already laterally unsupported at the top, Column 3 of Table 9.15.4.2.-A is still applicable for the determination of the wall thickness without reinforcement around the opening.</p> <p></p> <hr/> <p>Patrick Shek, P.Eng., CP, FEC, Committee Chair</p>	
<p>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 <i>Authority Having Jurisdiction</i>. The views of the joint committee should not be construed as legal advice.</p>	

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2. Yes (with conditions).

If the wall around the opening is not reinforced, Sentence 9.15.4.3.(3) only considers the wall beneath the opening laterally unsupported while the rest of wall in question is still considered laterally supported at the top.

There is nothing in Table 9.15.4.2.-A that prohibits applying it to different wall panels within the same foundation wall. Technically, for the wall beneath the opening, the thickness can be designed using Column 3 while the rest of the wall can be designed using Column 4, 5 or 6 provided the height of finished ground complies with the maximum for each column.

Since the thickness designed using Column 3 is thicker than that of Column 4 to 6, one may end up with thicker wall under the opening. It would be unusual to vary thickness and the height of finished ground across the wall length.

In practice one uniform wall thickness equal to the most restrictive column should be used. Although there will be load sharing and stress redistribution across the wall, Table 9.15.4.2.-A does not make allowance for such complexity.

If one wants to consider the entire wall with the opening as laterally supported wall and use just Column 4 to 6 to come up with a thinner wall then the wall around the opening should be reinforced as required by Sentence 9.14.4.3.(3).



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

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