Fire Separation Distance Maximum
Openings Allowed
For Single Family Homes

Interpretation

**Issue Date**  November 7, 2011; Revised January 2016

**Code/Section**  2012 International Residential Code (IRC) Section R302.1

**Approved:**  Technical Review Team

**Developed By:**  Staff

**Issue:**
Residential zoning commonly requires a 3 foot setback.  Single family residences are commonly designed along the 3 foot setback with porches, patios, and carports located on the corners and sides of the house.  Detached accessory structures are often designed along the 3 foot setback.

- Table R302.1(1) in the 2012 International Residential Code (IRC) requires a 1 hour fire resistance rating for exterior walls with a fire separation distance of less than 5 feet.
- Table R302.1(1) limits openings in walls to 25% maximum of the wall area for exterior walls with a fire separation distance of 3 feet.

This creates a design challenge where home designers have to choose between partially enclosing the construction with a fire resistance rated wall or jogging the wall line to meet minimum fire separation distances.

**Interpretation:**
Unlimited openings in walls shall be allowed for attached carports, porches, patio covers and detached accessory structures provided the following conditions are met:

1. A minimum fire separation distance of 3 feet shall be maintained from the property line.
2. The horizontal covering over the structure is an open structure (at least 50% open). For example: lattice cover
3. All other design elements shall comply with the requirements of Table R302.1(1).

Note: This interpretation applies only to IRC Table R302.1(1) and shall not be construed to reduce zoning requirements.

**Rationale:** IRC section R302.1 defines fire resistant construction for exterior walls of buildings. There are no exterior walls present in the conditions listed above, the spaces are not enclosed, and there is no additional fire hazard presented.