Real Estate Council Alberta

Consumer

Real Estate Council of Alberta

Consumer Guide to the Residential Measurement Standard in Alberta

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RECA would like to thank UrbanMeasure Inc. for many of the diagrams in this Guide.

Disclaimer
This Guide does not include every possible residential measurement situation, and it is not legal advice.

Alberta real estate professionals must use the Residential Measurement Standard (RMS) when measuring residential properties. This measurement standard helps consumers easily and accurately compare different types of residential properties. This Guide will help consumers understand the RMS, and how Alberta real estate professionals use it.

Your real estate professional has a responsibility to ensure you understand the RMS and its implications, and is required to discuss it with you. This discussion will help you make informed decisions about the size and suitability of properties.

Some Key Definitions

Grade: Grade is the level of the ground around the exterior of a residence. The grade can be horizontal, sloped, or a combination of both. In Alberta, most residential properties contain above grade and below grade areas.

Levels: Levels are areas of the residence that are in the same horizontal plane. A level must meet the minimum ceiling height requirement [2.13 metres (7 feet)] to be included in the RMS calculation.

Above Grade Levels: Above grade levels are the levels of a residence that are entirely above grade. The RMS area of a residence is the sum of its above grade floor levels.

Below Grade Levels: Below grade levels are the floor levels of a residence that are partly or fully below grade. If any portion of the level is below grade, the entire level is below grade. Below grade spaces include lower levels and basements. Below grade levels are not included in the RMS area. Examples of residential styles with lower levels include raised bungalows, bi-levels, split levels, and properties with walkout or walk-up basements.

The RMS contains nine principles that real estate professionals must follow when measuring the size of a residential property:

1. Real estate professionals must use the RMS.
When a seller wants to communicate the size of their residence to potential buyers, or a buyer wants to measure a residence they're considering, their real estate professional must communicate the RMS area.

Real estate professionals are allowed to hire someone to calculate the RMS area of a property, such as property measurement companies or real estate appraisers. The real estate professional must ensure the person is able to competently measure the property using the RMS.

If it is not possible to measure a residence, for example the residence is not yet built or access isn't possible because of a difficult tenant or a difficult foreclosure, your real estate professional may deviate from measuring the property using the RMS as long as:

- the measurements represented do not imply they are in accordance with the RMS
- they include an explanation as to why the property could not be measured using the RMS
- they must apply the RMS to blueprints
- they must disclose the measurement methodology they used (i.e. area size calculated by applying the RMS to the builder's blueprints)

2. Identify if the measurement system is metric or imperial, and apply it consistently. Measurements must be calculated to within 2% of the RMS size.
Real estate professionals must indicate what measurement system they used to take property measurements (metric or imperial), and they must take all measurements for a particular property using the same system. The real estate professional must talk to about which measurement system is appropriate. In a lot of cases, a key factor in deciding which measurement system to use is which measurement system the real estate professional's listing service or property database uses.

While the RMS provides a 2% tolerance, real estate professionals must attempt to measure the property accurately.

3. For detached properties, measure the property using the exterior wall at the foundation.
Your real estate professional may run into situations where direct measurement of the exterior wall at the foundation is not possible because of terrain, structures, landscaping, or other obstacles. When this happens, a real estate professional may extrapolate exterior measurements by measuring the interior surface of the perimeter walls, and adding the exterior wall thickness.

Example: measure the exterior wall at the foundation

Image courtesy of UrbanMeasure Inc.

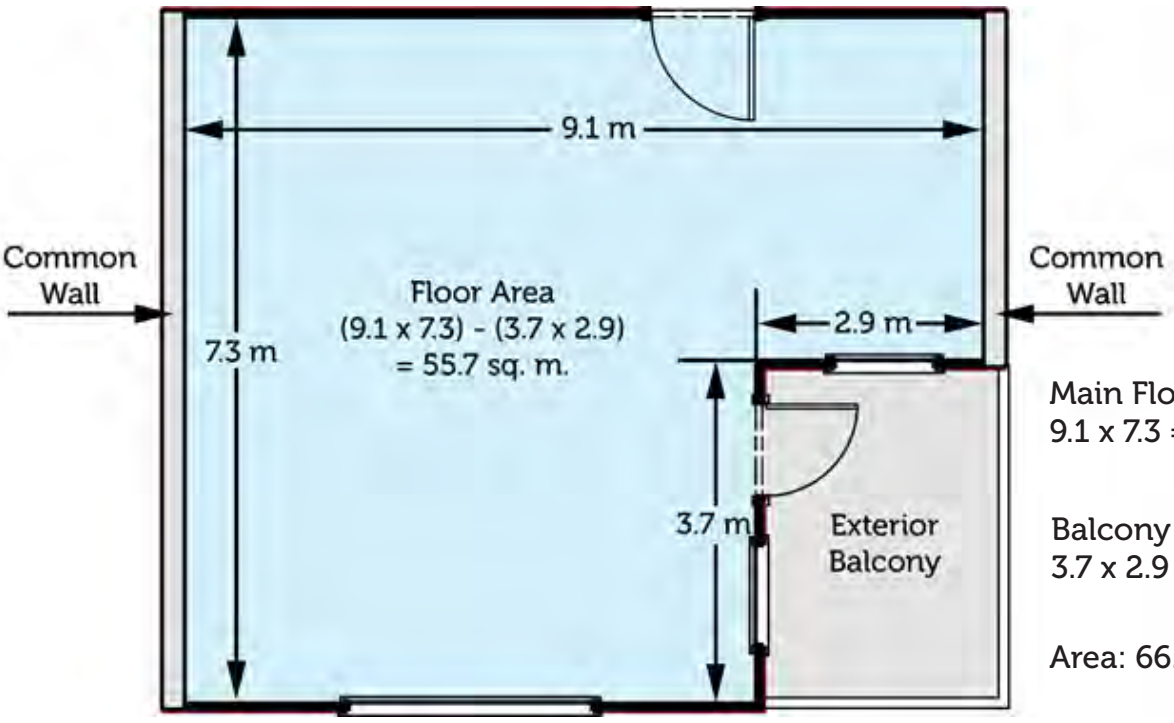
4. For properties with common walls, such as half-duplexes, townhouses, and apartments, measure the interior perimeter walls (paint-to-paint) at floor level. An additional area representation may be made assuming exterior measurements.

Common walls – sometimes referred to as party walls or demising walls – separate attached and semi-detached properties, such as half-duplexes, villas, townhouses, and apartments. Your real estate professional must measure the above grade levels of properties with common walls from the interior surface of the perimeter walls. This is also called "taking paint-to-paint measurements."

To help you compare the size of different types of residential properties (detached vs. semi-detached), real estate professionals can provide you with an additional measurement that includes the property's exterior. Your real estate professional must base this additional measurement on reasonable assumptions about the exterior wall thickness. Because the RMS requires real estate professionals to measure detached properties differently than attached and semi-detached properties, the assumed exterior measurements allows consumers to compare different types of residential properties

Attached Townhouse- Floor Level

Example: how to measure an attached townhouse using the interior surface of the perimeter walls. Although the balcony is covered, it is not suitable for year-round use. Therefore, real estate professionals must exclude it from the total above grade floor area (explained in Principle 6 on page 7).



Main Floor:
9.1 x 7.3 = 66.43

Balcony (not included):
3.7 x 2.9 = 10.73

Area: 66.43 - 10.73 = 55.7 sq.m

Image courtesy of UrbanMeasure Inc.

5. Include floor levels that are entirely above grade and exclude floor levels if any portion is below grade. Below grade levels may be measured, but the area must not be included in the RMS area.

Real estate professionals calculate the RMS area by adding the floor area of all above grade levels of the residence. Stairs leading to a level above ground are exempt from the application of this Principle.

Below grade levels typically add value to a property. Although real estate professionals are required to exclude below grade levels from the RMS area, they are allowed to measure and communicate below grade levels, separately from the RMS area, as long as:

- the communication clearly indicates the area measurements are for below grade levels
- they include how they calculated the measurement (from exterior or interior measurements)
- any representation of finished vs. unfinished space must not be misleading
- they include a disclosure statement if the below grade area does not meet the minimum 2.13 metres (7 feet) ceiling height requirement (discussed in Principle 7 on page 8)

Example: this bungalow with a walkout basement must only include the 95 sq. metres above grade area in the RMS area.

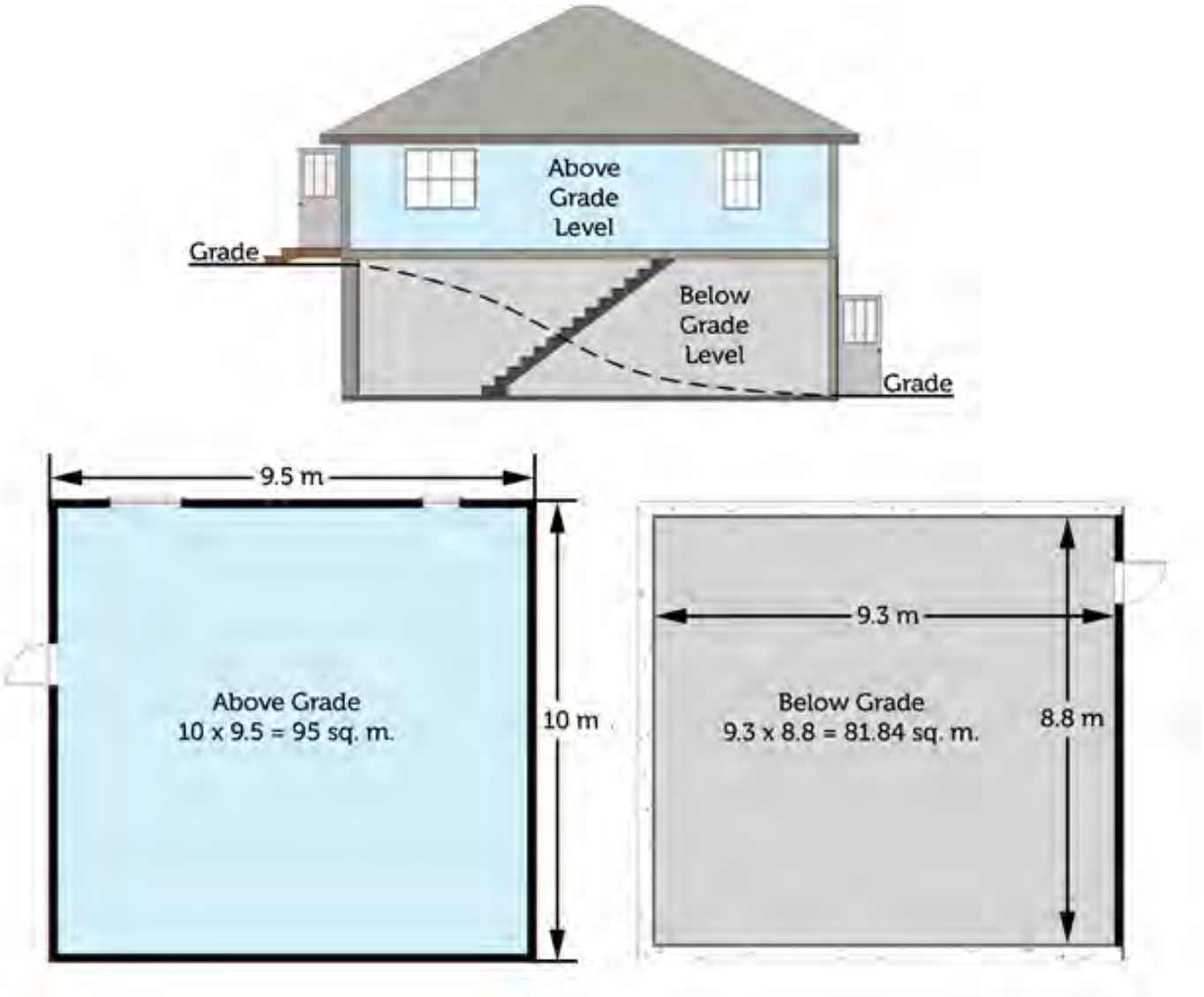


Image courtesy of UrbanMeasure Inc.

Example: a real estate professional may make the representation, "70 sq. metre 4-level split with 201.75 sq. metres of additional space on 3 below grade levels. The first below grade level is only one foot below grade and the second below grade level is a walkout. Total above and below grade living area is a 271.75 sq. metres."

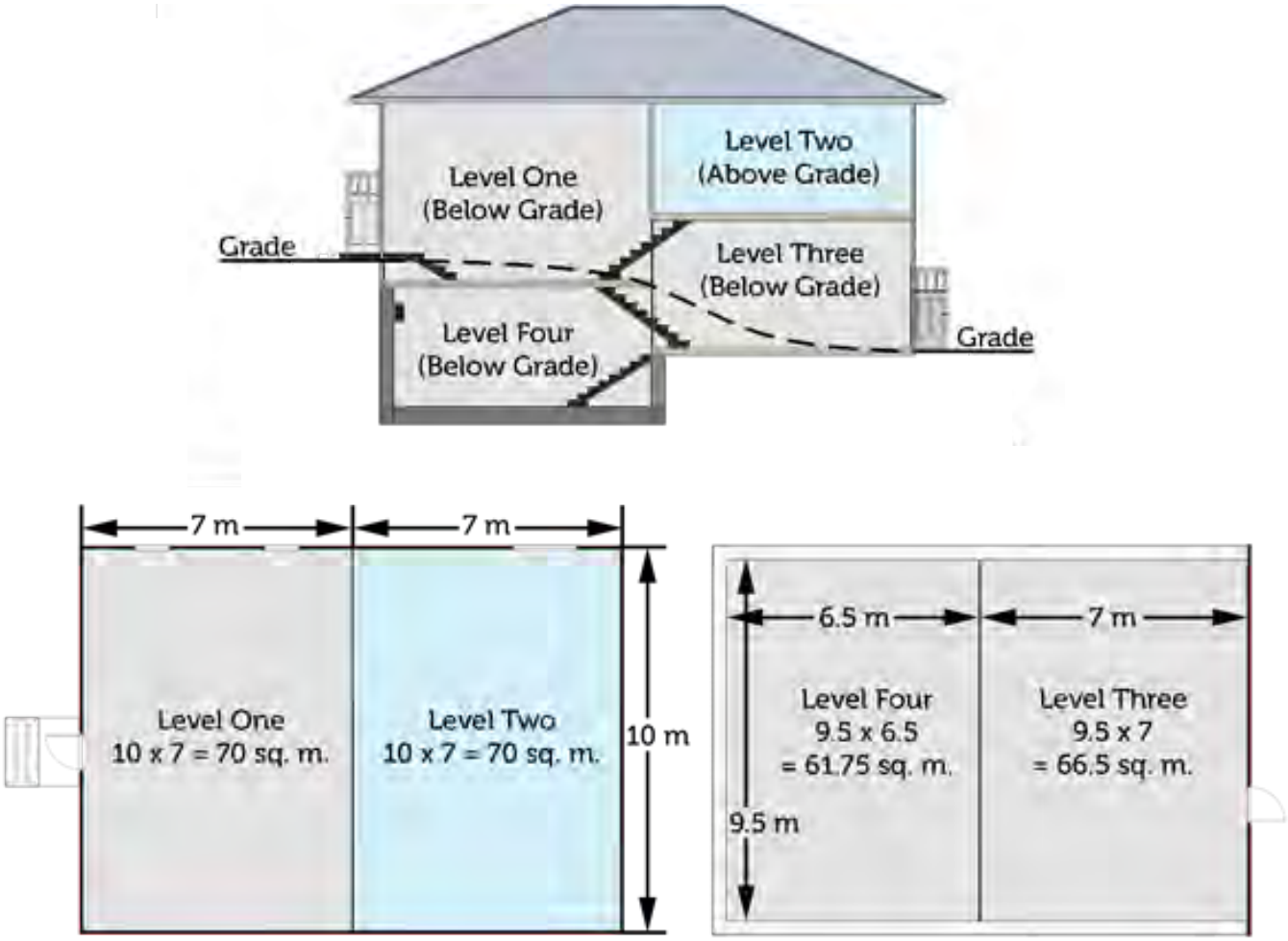


Image courtesy of UrbanMeasure Inc.

6. Include all additions to the main structure and conversions of above grade areas within the structure if they are weatherproof and suitable for year-round use.

The RMS area includes any additions and conversions to the main residential property as long as the addition or conversion meets the following criteria:

- the structure is permanent, and has a foundation or footings
- the structure or conversion is connected permanently to the main electrical service
- the main heating system heats the structure or conversion, or it has its own permanent heating system. The heating system is able to heat the space to 22°C year-round. The real estate professional must use their judgement as to whether the heating system is reasonably able to heat the space to 22°C in winter. If unsure, they may clarify their decision when communicating about the property. Temporary mobile space heaters or extension cords are not suitable sources of heat or electricity.

7. The property must have a minimum floor-to-ceiling height of 2.13 metres (7 feet). If the ceiling is sloped, the area with a floor-to-ceiling- height of at least 1.52 metres (5 feet) is included in the RMS area, provided there is a ceiling height of 2.13 metres (7 feet) somewhere in the room. Ductwork, beams, and other obstructions are included in the level, as long as the floor-to-ceiling height to the ductwork, beams, and other obstructions exceeds 1.52 metres (5 feet).

For rooms with sloped ceilings, the floor area with ceiling height over 1.52 metres (5 feet) is included in the RMS area as long as there is a ceiling height of 2.13 metres (7 feet) somewhere in the room. The RMS area must exclude the portions of the floor area with a ceiling height of less than 1.52 metres (5 feet).

Example: sloped ceiling on the second floor has areas above and below 1.5 metres in height

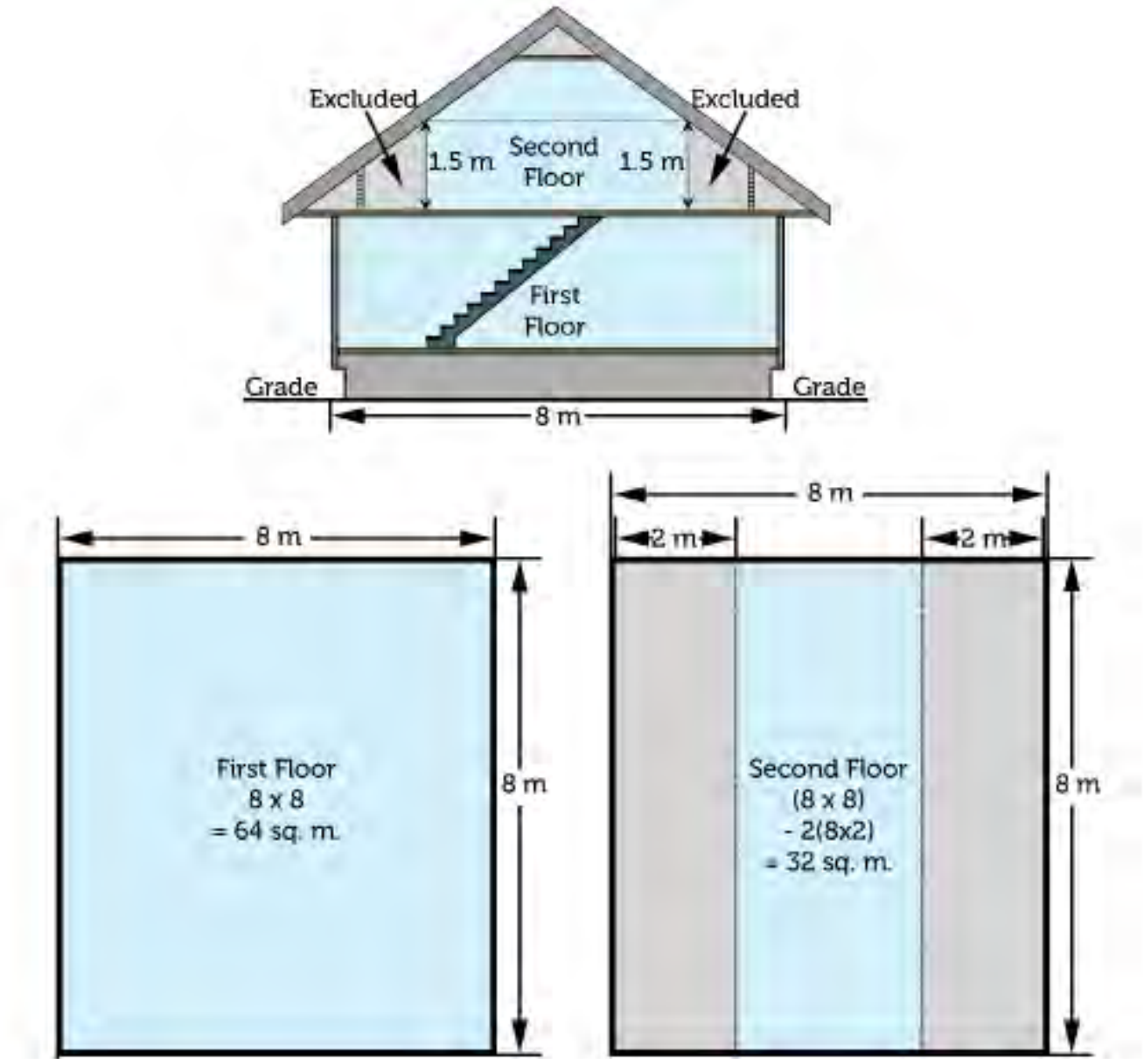


Image courtesy of UrbanMeasure Inc.

8. Include extensions from the main structure that have a minimum floor-to-ceiling height of 1.5 metres (5 feet), such as cantilevers, bay and bow window, and dormers.
The 1.52 metres (5 feet) minimum height must start at floor level. Examples include cantilevers, bay windows, bow windows, box windows, dormer windows, and other above grade extensions that meet the minimum floor-to-ceiling height requirement. Your real estate professional must add these above grade areas to the RMS area for the residence. However, real estate professionals must exclude areas that do not start at floor level, even if they meet the minimum floor-to-ceiling height requirement.

Example: include this bay window in the RMS area, as it meets the minimum floor-to-ceiling height and starts at floor level

Example: exclude this bay window from the RMS area. Although it meets the minimum floor-to-ceiling height, it does not start at floor level.

9. Exclude open areas that have no floor, such as vaulted areas.
The RMS area needs to exclude open areas that have no floor associated with them, such as vaulted ceilings. When measuring detached properties, your real estate professional must always deduct the open areas and vaulted areas from the upper level measurements so that they are consistent with exterior measurements.

Your real estate professional will treat open areas with stairs by:

- counting the stairs in the above grade level they lead to
- counting the stairs in the above grade level they lead to even if part or all of the stairs are below grade (exception to Principle 5)
- deducting from the floor level the portion of the stair opening that is larger than the area of the stair treads and landings

Example: this property has a stairwell to the upper level. Because the area of the stairwell opening equals the area of the stair treads, there is no open area to exclude from upper floor measurements.

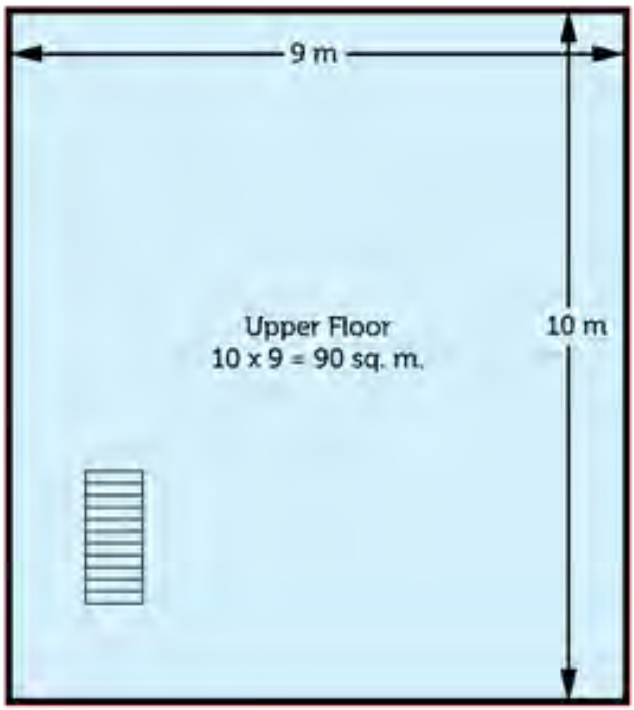


Image courtesy of UrbanMeasure Inc.

Example: this property has a stairwell with an open area that is larger than the area of the stair treads on the landing. The open area that is greater than the area of the treads and landing is deducted from the upper floor measurements.

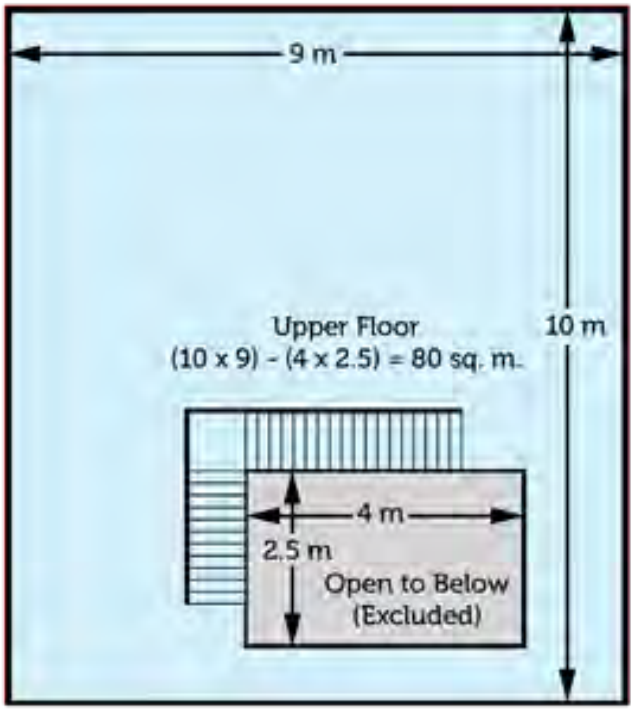


Image courtesy of UrbanMeasure Inc.

Example: how to measure a residential property with an open area. The 2-storey split has an open ceiling area between the 1st floor and the 2nd floor on one side. Real estate professionals must measure the open area and exclude it from the RMS area.

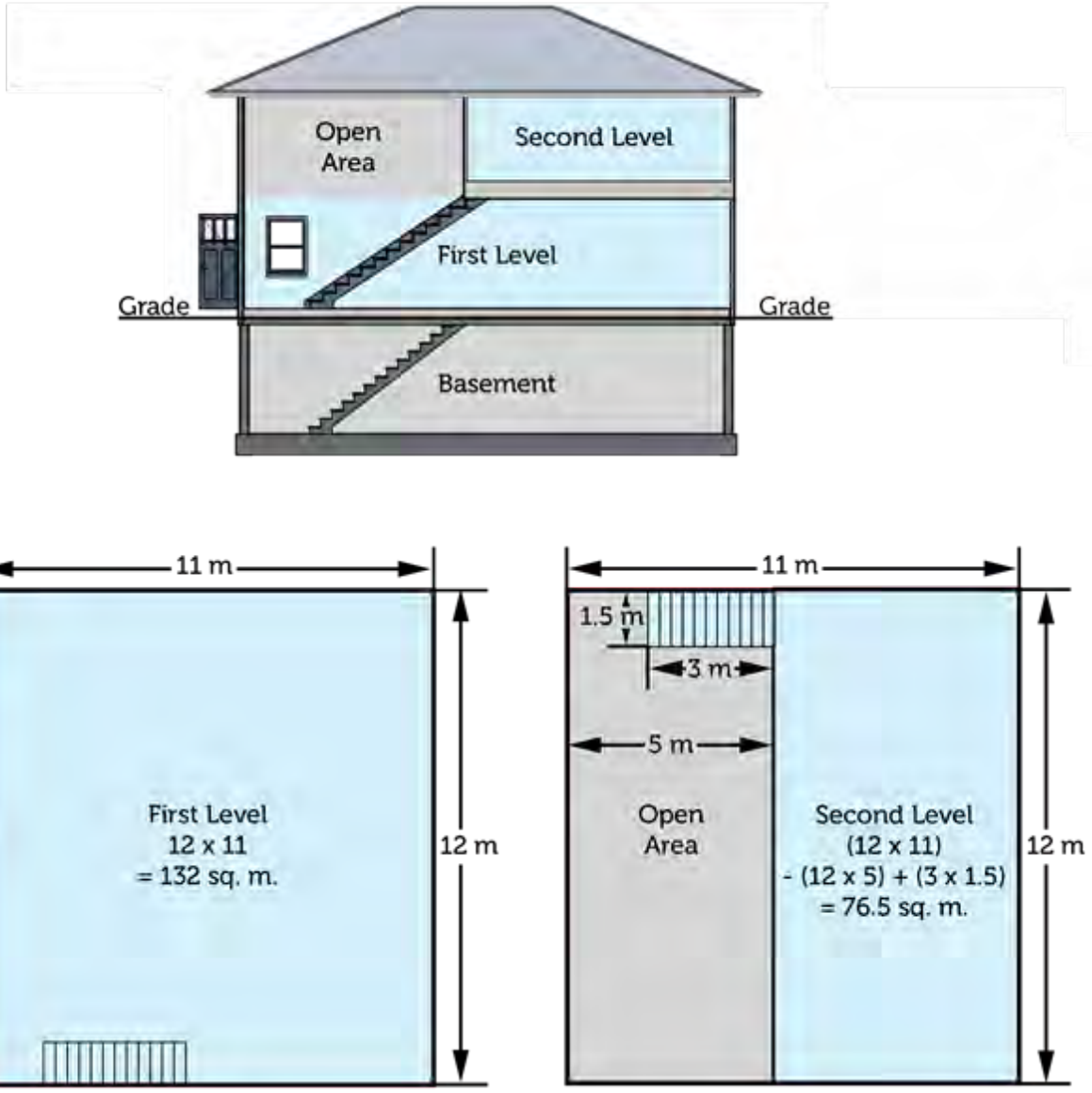


Image courtesy of UrbanMeasure Inc.

When You're a Buyer

As a buyer, your real estate representative must explain the relationship between property size and price, the measured size the seller is representing, what it entails, and information about details such as above grade and below grade measurements.

Property size and measurement are important factors for most buyers and your real estate professional has to discuss the following with you:

- how property size factors into a buyer's decision to purchase
- the relationship between property size and asking price
- the RMS:
  - o What is included and excluded in the measurements
  - o how professionals take measurements and calculate them
- if the property is a condominium:
  - o the different between RMS size and the condominium unit registered size
  - o what is included and excluded in the RMS size
  - o what is included and excluded in the condominium unit registered size
- your options to determine property size, and your instructions

Many purchase contracts contain clauses that place the onus on the buyer to verify a property's size. If property size is important to you, make sure you talk about it with your real estate professional, and take steps to verify the size rather than relying on the seller's representation.

If you want to verify measurements, you can ask your real estate professional to hire a property measurement company, or you or your real estate representative can measure the property. You and your real estate professional should discuss whether you want to take measurements before making an offer to purchase or as a condition of your offer, and who will pay the cost of the measurement company.

Throughout this process, as a buyer, keep in mind that a property's size isn't the only thing sellers are using to set a listing price for their home. Two homes, with the exact same measurements, are unlikely to sell at the same price. The price of a home also depends on features, décor, state of upkeep, and location, among other things.

When You're a Seller

As a seller, your real estate representative must explain the relationship between property size and price, the role of the RMS, what it entails, and information about details such as above grade and below grade measurements.

Your real estate professional has to discuss the following with you:

- the relationship between property size and asking price
- the RMS:
  - what is included and excluded in the measurements
  - how professionals take measurements and calculate them
  - how size descriptors in marketing materials must follow the RMS
- if the property is a condominium:
  - the difference between RMS size and the condominium unit registered size
  - what is included and excluded in the RMS size
  - what is included and excluded in the condominium unit registered size
- as a seller, you are not required to represent the size of their property, however:
  - property size is often important to buyers and other real estate professionals
  - the listing service/property database may have a mandatory property size field
- if you want to represent the size of your property to potential buyers, you need to use the RMS
  - you and your real estate professional may provide additional information, if it's not misleading, and it meets RMS requirements
- if your real estate professional will measure your property, or engage another qualified person to measure it using the RMS and who will pay the cost to do so

Throughout this process, as a seller, keep in mind that a property's size isn't the only thing buyers are concerned about. Two homes, with the exact same measurements, are unlikely to sell at the same price. The price of your home also depends on features, décor, state of upkeep, and location, among other things.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