



# TINY HOUSES

## CODE FACT SHEET

Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

### OVERVIEW

"Tiny houses" have received a lot of attention and interest in recent years. The following information is provided to clarify how these small structures are regulated by the Minnesota State Building Code. The Minnesota State Building Code is the standard of construction that applies statewide for the construction of buildings (MS § 326B.121) including tiny houses.

Some tiny houses are designed as trailers and referred to as park models or recreational park trailers that are on a chassis with wheels. Tiny houses built like park models but without the chassis and wheels are often referred to as industrialized/modular buildings and regulated accordingly.

Loosely defined, tiny houses range from about 100 to 400 square feet. The following describes how these houses are regulated by building codes, zoning codes and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

### Zoning requirements

Municipalities establish zoning ordinances to regulate land use, location, height, width, type of foundation, number of stories and size of buildings. These zoning ordinances vary by municipality.

Minimum building size varies from areas of 500 to 2,000 square feet. Jurisdictions may also require minimum lot sizes related to the house size. Sometimes there are minimum house size requirements such as 24 feet by 24 feet or a minimum dimension of 20 feet. Because of these varying requirements, the jurisdiction must be consulted for specifics.

### Building codes

Tiny houses, like all other houses, are required to comply with building codes. Minnesota adopts the 2012 International Residential Code (IRC) by reference with amendments. It is known as the 2015 Minnesota Residential Code. The "code," for the purpose of constructing houses, means the 2015 Minnesota Residential Code. It is the standard that applies statewide.

The 2015 Minnesota Residential Code defines a dwelling as a single unit providing complete independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation. By definition, a tiny house is a dwelling unit and



The trend of tiny houses has received a lot of attention in recent years. This handout is provided to clarify how these small structures are regulated by the Minnesota State Building code.

#### Other codes related to house construction include:

- 2015 Minnesota Energy Code
- 2015 Minnesota Mechanical Code
- 2015 Minnesota Electrical Code
- 2015 Minnesota Rules Chapter 1303
- Minnesota Plumbing Code

regulated by the code. The code includes requirements for light, ventilation, heating, minimum room sizes, ceiling heights, sanitation, toilet, bath and shower spaces, emergency escape and rescue openings, means of egress, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms.

## RECREATIONAL PARK TRAILER

Recreational park trailers, or park models, are tiny houses built on a chassis with wheels. These trailers are primarily designed as temporary living quarters for recreational, camping or seasonal use but not a year-round dwelling. These trailers are often constructed to ANSI standard (A119.5) and are self-certified by the manufacturer with the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA).

The gross floor area for park models must not exceed 400 square feet when set up. Recreational park trailers exceeding 400 square feet must comply with HUD's manufactured housing program as a manufactured home. HUD defines the gross square footage as encompassing the full width and full length of the unit, including

porches.

A data plate must be attached to the recreational park trailers that includes:

- name and address of the manufacturer
- serial number or vehicle identification number (VIN) of the unit
- date of manufacture
- a statement that the unit is designed to ANSI A119.5.

Recreational park trailers or park models intended as permanent living dwelling units must be designed, constructed and installed in accordance with the 2015 Minnesota Residential Code.

## PREFABRICATED BUILDINGS

### Minnesota Rules, Chapter 1360

Dwellings constructed as prefabricated buildings must comply with the requirements of Minnesota Rules Chapter 1360 and be designed and constructed in accordance with the 2015 Minnesota Residential Code. Review of building plans and inspections are performed by the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry. The completed building requires a Minnesota prefabricated building label.

Prefabricated building manufacturers are permitted to build three or fewer buildings per year. Construction of more than three buildings is regulated by Minnesota Rules Chapter 1361 for industrialized/modular buildings.

A data plate must be attached to the dwelling that includes the following minimum information:

- design loads
- codes
- IBC label numbers
- serial numbers
- model designation
- date of manufacture
- name and address of manufacture
- occupancy and type of construction.



**Example prefab construction label -**  
located under kitchen sink.

All on-site work is subject to local jurisdiction and inspections according to the 2015 Minnesota Residential Code.

## INDUSTRIALIZED/MODULAR BUILDINGS

### Minnesota Rules, Chapter 1361; Industrialized Modular Building Commission (IMBC)

Dwellings constructed as modular buildings must comply with Minnesota Rules Chapter 1361 and the Industrialized Modular Buildings Commission (IMBC). These modular dwellings must be designed and constructed in accordance with the 2015 Minnesota Residential Code. Review of dwelling plans and in-plant inspections are performed by a certified IMBC third-party agency.

Modular buildings must have IMBC construction labels on each building section or every 600 square feet of closed panels.

A data plate must be attached to the dwelling that includes the following minimum information:

- design loads
- codes

## Continued: Minnesota Rules, Chapter 1361; Industrialized Modular Building Commission (IMBC)

- serial numbers
- IBC label numbers
- model designation
- date of manufacture
- name and address of manufacture
- occupancy and type of construction.



**Example IMBC label** - located inside each home section.

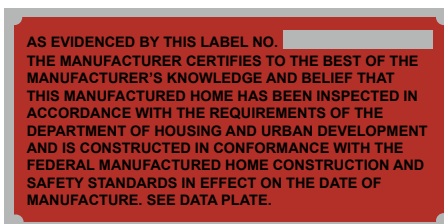
All on-site work is subject to local jurisdiction and inspections according to the 2015 Minnesota Residential Code.

## HUD MANUFACTURED HOMES

"Manufactured home" means a single family dwelling in one or more sections, which in the traveling mode is 8 body feet or more in width or 40 body feet or more in length, or, when erected on site, is 320 or more square feet, and which is built on a permanent chassis and designed to be used as a dwelling with or without a permanent foundation when connected to the required utilities.

A data plate must be attached to the dwelling unit to include the following as a minimum:

- design loads
- codes
- label numbers
- serial numbers
- model designation,
- date of manufacture
- name and address of manufacturer



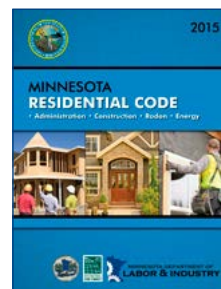
**Example HUD construction label** - located on exterior of each section.

Review of dwelling plans and in-plant inspections are performed by HUD-certified third-party agencies. All on-site work is subject to the local jurisdiction and inspections according to the 2015 Minnesota Residential Code.

## SITE-BUILT STRUCTURES

Tiny homes constructed on site are regulated by the Minnesota State Building Code. The dwelling construction must comply with all the requirements of the 2015 Minnesota Residential Code.

The 2015 Minnesota Residential Code can be viewed at <http://codes.iccsafe.org/app/book/toc/2015/Minnesota/Residential/index.html>.



## SUMMARY

If the tiny house does not:

- have a chassis and axles, or
- have a HUD manufactured home label, or
- have a RVIA park model label, then
- it is either a prefabricated or industrialized modular building subject to Minnesota Rules Chapters 1360 or 1361 or site-built subject to Minnesota Rules Chapter 1309.

NOTE: Any modular unit of closed construction built away from the site of occupancy must be labeled (Minnesota Rules, chapters 1360 or 1361).

Closed construction means any building manufactured so that all portions cannot be readily inspected at the installation site without disassembly, damage to, or destruction thereof (Minnesota Rules, Chapter 1360.0200 Subp. 5).

## 2015 MINNESOTA RESIDENTIAL CODE

The following code references provide general code requirements related to dwelling construction. Knowledge of the entire state code is necessary to obtain compliance.

### General requirements

#### R202 – Definition of dwelling unit and habitable space.

Dwelling unit: A single unit providing complete independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation.

Habitable space: A space in a building for living, sleeping, eating or cooking. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces and similar areas are not considered habitable spaces.

#### R301.1 Application.

Buildings and structures shall be constructed to safely support all loads, including dead loads, live loads, roof loads, flood loads, snow loads, wind loads and seismic loads prescribed in this code. The construction of buildings and structures in this code shall result in a structure that transfers all loads from their point of origin to the foundation.

#### R303 – Light, ventilation and heating

R303.1 – Habitable rooms shall have 8 percent of the floor area as natural light and 4 percent of the floor area as natural ventilation (see exceptions).

R303.3 – Bathrooms shall have 3 square feet of natural light and 1.5 square feet of natural ventilation (see exception).

R303.4 – Mechanical ventilation (see Minnesota Rules 1322 and 1346) requirements.

R303.5 – Intake and exhaust openings (see Minnesota Rules 1346) requirements.

R303.9 – Dwelling must be capable of maintaining a minimum room temperature of 68 degrees at three feet above the floor and two feet from the exterior walls (excludes use of portable heaters).

#### R304 – Minimum room areas

R304.1 – Every dwelling unit shall have at least one habitable room of 120 square feet.

R304.2 – Other habitable rooms (except kitchens) 70 square feet. R304.3 – Habitable rooms (except kitchens) must have a minimum dimension of 7 feet.

#### R305 – Ceiling height

R305.1 – Habitable space (hallways,

bathrooms, toilet rooms, laundry rooms and portions of basements containing these spaces) must have a ceiling height of 7 feet (see exceptions for measuring sloped ceilings).

R305.1.1 – Basements without habitable space (hallways, bathrooms, toilet rooms, laundry rooms and portions of basements containing these spaces) must have a minimum ceiling height of 6 feet, 8 inches (see exceptions for beams and girders).

#### R306 – Sanitation

R306.1 – Every dwelling unit must have a water closet, lavatory and a tub or shower.

R306.2 – Each kitchen must have a sink.

R306.3 – All plumbing fixtures must be connected to a sanitary sewer or approved private sewage system.

R306.4 – All plumbing fixtures must be connected to an approved water supply. Kitchen sinks, lavatories, bathtubs, showers, bidets, laundry tubs, and washing machines must have hot and cold water.

#### R307 – Toilet, bath and shower spaces

R307.1 – Space required, see Minnesota plumbing code for required plumbing fixture clearances.

R307.2 – Bathtub and shower floors and walls (bathtubs installed with shower heads and in shower compartments) must have a nonabsorbent surface a minimum of six feet above the floor.

#### R310 – Emergency escape and rescue openings

R310.1 – Basements, habitable attics and every sleeping room must at least one operable emergency escape and rescue opening (door or window).

R310.1.1 – Minimum opening area must be 5.7 square feet (see full code text for minimum height and width dimensions).

#### R311 – Means of egress

R311.1 – All dwellings must have a means of egress.

R311.2 – The egress door must have a clear width of 32 inches and a clear height of 78 inches.

R311.3 – A floor or landing is required on each side of exterior doors (see R311.3.1

through R311.3.3).

R311.5.1 – Exterior landings must be positively attached to the primary structure.

R311.6 – Hallway must have a minimum width of 36 inches. R311.7 – Stairways must have a minimum width of 36 inches. R311.7.5 – Stair treads must be 10 inch minimum and stair risers 7.75 inch maximum.

R311.7.5.3 – Stair nosings must be provided and compliant with this section.

R311.7.5.4 – Composite wood or plastic stair treads must comply with R507.3.

R311.7.6 – A floor or landing is required at the top and bottom of each stairway.

R311.7.8 – A handrail is required at stairs having four or more risers (see all railing requirements).

#### R314 – Smoke alarms

R314.3 – Smoke alarms are required in each sleeping room, in the immediate vicinity of the bedrooms and on each additional story of the dwelling including basements and habitable attics.

#### R315 – Carbon monoxide alarms

R315.1 – A carbon monoxide alarm is required in every dwelling unit having fuel fired appliances or attached garage.

#### MR 1322 – 2015 Minnesota Residential Energy Code

The dwelling must comply with the Minnesota Energy Code.

#### MR 1346 – 2015 Minnesota Mechanical Code

The dwelling must comply with the Minnesota Mechanical Code.

#### MR 1303 – Radon requirements

The dwelling must comply with Minnesota Rules Chapter 1303 for either passive or active radon control systems.

#### MR 1315 – Minnesota Electrical Code

All electrical service, wiring and fixtures for the structure must comply with the 2014 National Electrical Code.

#### MR 4715 – Minnesota Plumbing Code

The dwelling must comply with the Minnesota Plumbing code.