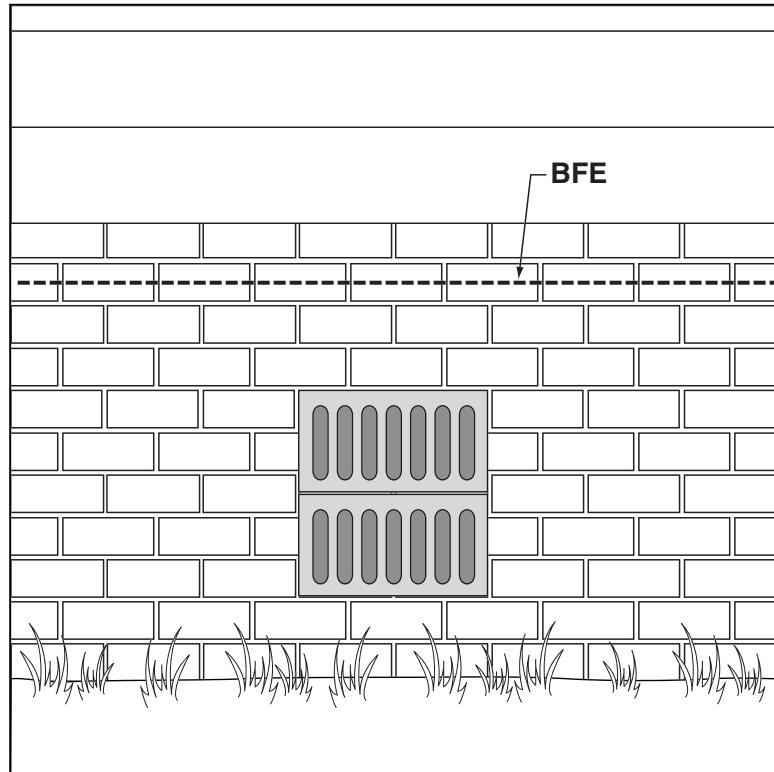


Figure 13. Stacked vents inserted in large openings must be below the BFE



Depth of water 1 foot or less

Some FIRMs show mapped SFHAs where the depth of water will be 1-foot deep or shallower. Although the difference in water depth between the outside and inside of the enclosure under a building in these areas will not exceed 1 foot during the base flood, the NFIP regulations require openings.

There are at least two solutions to this situation. The first is to elevate the floor of the enclosure the necessary height so that it is at or above the BFE and there is no need for openings. The second solution is to install openings, taking care to ensure that all of the necessary open area is below the BFE (otherwise the openings will not function as intended). This can be accomplished by positioning the bottom of the openings at or very close to grade, rather than the maximum of 1 foot above grade. In addition to complying with the regulations, the walls will not experience excessive differential hydrostatic pressure when floodwaters rise higher than the BFE.

Non-Engineered Openings and Engineered Openings

The NFIP regulations identify alternatives to provide sufficient size and number of openings to allow for the automatic entry and exit of floodwaters. This section describes how this level of performance can be satisfied by use of:

- Non-engineered openings (or covers and devices) that meet the prescriptive requirement to provide 1 square inch of net open area for each square foot of enclosed area (as

described below, a variety of options and devices can serve as non-engineered openings).

- Engineered openings (or covers and devices) that are specifically designed and certified by a registered design professional as meeting the required performance and design requirements outlined below (and, if applicable, the community's building code).
- Engineered openings (or covers and devices) for which an Evaluation Report has been issued by the International Code Council (ICC) Evaluation Service, Inc. (ICC-ES), a subsidiary of the International Code Council, Inc. (<http://www.iccsafe.org>).

The International Residential Code® includes both the prescriptive (non-engineered) alternative and the engineered openings alternative.

The International Building Code® also includes both alternatives by reference to ASCE 24.

The following requirements for installation apply regardless of whether engineered openings or non-engineered openings are used to satisfy the NFIP requirements (also see page 13, Requirements and Guidance for Installation of Openings):

- Each enclosed area must have a minimum of two openings; if there are multiple enclosed areas, each area must have openings in its exterior walls,
- The bottom of each opening must be no more than 1 foot above the higher of the interior or exterior grade immediately under the opening, and
- Any screens, grates, grilles, fixed louvers, or other covers or devices must not block or impede the automatic flow of floodwaters into and out of the enclosed area.

Unacceptable Measures

It is important to note that FEMA has determined that certain measures are not acceptable as flood openings, including:

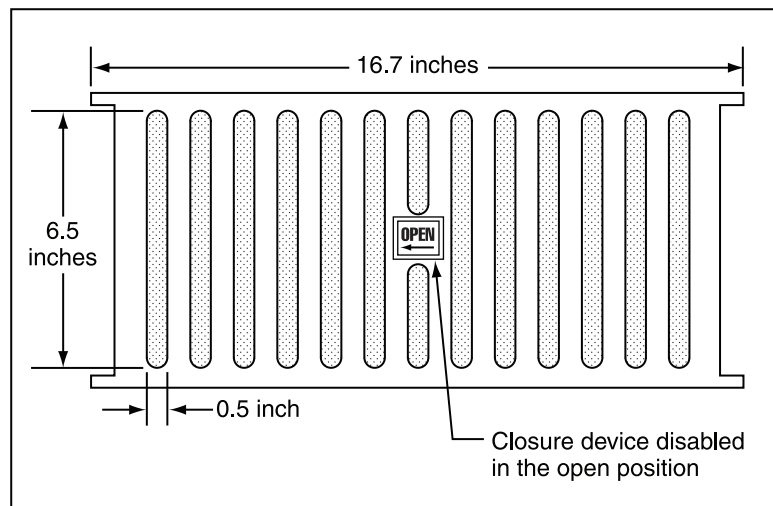
- Standard foundation air ventilation devices that can be closed manually, because they do not allow for the automatic entry and exit of floodwaters unless they are permanently disabled in the open position.
- Standard foundation air ventilation devices that have detachable solid covers that are intended to be manually installed over the opening in cold weather, because they do not allow for the automatic entry and exit of floodwaters when the cover is in place.
- Standard foundation air ventilation devices that are designed to open and close based on temperature (unless they also are designed to allow for the automatic entry and exit of floodwaters).
- Windows below the BFE, because the automatic entry and exit of floodwaters cannot be satisfied by the expectation that windows will break under rising floodwaters.
- Garage doors without openings installed in them, because human intervention is required to open the doors when flooding is expected. Gaps between the garage door and the door jamb or walls do not count towards the net open area requirement.
- Standard exterior doors without openings installed in them.

Non-Engineered Openings

Non-engineered openings are openings that are used to satisfy the prescriptive requirement that calls for 1 square inch of net open area for each square foot of enclosed area. A wide variety of options is available to satisfy the prescriptive requirements.

The term “net open area” refers to the permanently open area of a non-engineered opening. The NFIP regulations indicate that flood openings may be equipped with coverings or devices provided that they permit the automatic entry and exit of floodwaters. The measurement of the net open area must take into consideration any coverings that have solid obstructions, such as grilles, fixed louvers, or faceplates. Figure 14 shows a typical standard air vent faceplate and measurements of the net open area.

Figure 14. Typical standard air vent faceplate (this example provides 42 square inches of net open area)



Manufacturers of devices intended for use as standard air vents typically indicate the number of square inches that each device provides for air flow (either stamped into the metal frame or noted on the packaging). The same number should be used for the net open area calculation when these devices are installed as non-engineered openings. However, in order to qualify as flood openings that permit automatic entry and exit of floodwaters, openings must not have solid covers that are installed during cold weather. Similarly, typical air vent devices that are designed to be opened and closed manually must be disabled permanently in the open position.

Insect screens that do not impede the entry and exit of floodwaters are allowed and do not affect the determination of the net open area. Communities that administer the *International Building Code*® (IBC®) or the *International Residential Code*® (IRC®) should note the requirement to cover ventilation openings to keep animals and insects from entering. These codes provide a list of acceptable covering materials. The commentaries that accompany those codes note that some covering materials may reduce the gross open area of the vent by as much as 50 percent. In areas where floodwaters are expected to carry debris such as grass clippings and leaves, it is notable that screens tend to clog (Figure 15). Local officials may determine that additional openings are required to increase the likelihood that openings will perform as expected, even if some become clogged with debris.