

## The Secrets to Properly Measuring Houses

Measuring houses is not as simple as it may at first seem. It is much more than hooking a measuring tape on one end of the house and stretching it to the other end.

Measuring houses has proved so difficult that the Georgia Multiple Listing Service has no place for the sales agent to enter the house size on their forms. Too many law suits were being generated by inaccurate sizes... and these were sizes reported by real estate professionals.

### A Standard was Needed

How to properly measure a house was much a matter of local custom. Over the years Americans had become more mobile. They were finding that when they moved from one part of the nation to another they were not getting what they thought they were getting in reported house sizes. Lenders began doing business nationwide and they needed a standardized system for comparison. When appraisers investigated comparable sales, they needed to be certain they were comparing apples to apples in regards to reported house sizes.

Home builders also entered the fray. The buyers of new homes needed a way to compare them. In essence, everyone involved with the real estate industry needed a standard method of measuring for comparison purposes.

In 1996, a national standard was adapted by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Although there was much discussion of the standards when first proposed and adopted, many real estate professionals remain unaware that a national standard exists.

The following is a simplified summary of the standard. We put in our own words and with some additional comments. If the size of your home is of significant concern to you, you are urged to obtain a copy of the 16 page booklet which may be purchased from ANSI or the National Association of Home Builders.

### Measuring the House

The first step in measuring a house is determining exactly what a "house" is. When we refer to "house", what we are actually referring to is "finished area", also often referred to as "Gross Living Area Above Grade or GLA". Finished area is defined by ANSI as: *An enclosed area in a house that is suitable for year-round use, embodying walls, floors and ceilings that are similar to the rest of the house.* An unfinished area is defined as: *Sections of a house which do not meet the criteria of finished area.*

For example, a laundry room in your basement with vinyl floor covering, prefinished panelboard walls and a drop ceiling (over seven feet in height) is considered a finished area. The exact same room, finished the exact same way but with a painted concrete floor is considered unfinished area. The reason being that the floor is not of similar finish as the rest of the house.

In essence, this means that porches, garages, carports, unfinished laundry or storage rooms and other similar areas are not part of your finished area and should not be included in the reported house size. Finished area is also reduced in a number of other ways to be discussed later in this report.

To begin measuring your home, begin at one corner (we prefer the front right) and measure each exterior wall of the house. We prefer to do this in a clockwise manner. Measurements should be taken from the outside finished edge of the wall, deducting for any corner trim. You will find that two homes which are exactly alike in every respect except that one has brick veneer and the other vinyl siding will measure out slightly different because of the different thickness of the materials.

You can not assume that each floor of a multi-story home is identical. If the house has brick veneer on the main floor and vinyl on the top floor, the top floor will probably measure out slightly smaller than the main floor.

Sketch each wall roughly to scale on graph paper as you proceed around the house. Measurements should be taken to the nearest inch or 1/10<sup>th</sup> of a foot.

Once completed, you should take your notes and using a straight edge and re-draw the house to scale on a clean sheet of graph paper. You can then use this drawing to calculate the size of your home. The size of your home should be reported to the nearest whole square foot.

### Converting Inches to Decimals

In order to properly calculate a homes square footage, you must convert inches to decimals. The following chart may prove to be of assistance.

<b>Inches</b>		<b>Decimal Equivalent</b>
1	=	0.0833
2	=	0.1667
3	=	0.2500
4	=	0.3333
5	=	0.4167
6	=	0.5000
7	=	0.5833
8	=	0.6667
9	=	0.7500
10	=	0.8333
11	=	0.9167
12	=	1.0000

### Special Considerations

If there is a garage or a carport, you must exclude it from your finished area. If you have stairways, include them on every level they serve, provided the opening for the stairs is no larger than the stairs. If the opening for the stairs is larger than the stairs themselves, the additional square footage for the opening must be deducted from the level on which the opening exists.

Other than stairways, any opening between levels must be deducted from the level on which the opening exists. For example: if you have an entrance foyer which is two stories high, you are credited that space only on the main level, even though the exterior walls extend around the area on the 2<sup>nd</sup> level.

Finished below grade areas (usually basements) can not be lumped in with your overall square footage. Below grade areas, if finished, are considered living area, but have to be delineated separately. For example: if you have 2,000 square feet on the main level and a 1,000 square foot finished basement, you do not have a 3,000 square foot house. What you do have is a 2,000 square foot home with a 1,000 square foot finished basement.

If any part of a particular level of your home is below grade the entire level must be delineated separately. This results in some homes, where a portion of the main level protrudes slightly into an embankment, having no actual above grade finished area.

Note that the standard states *any* part. If you are in a situation where the builder extended the main level of your home into an embankment, even slightly, your entire main level is considered below grade. Correction of the problem might require the embankment being dug out a few feet away from the house and a retaining wall constructed to hold back the soil.

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For a room to be counted as finished area, flat ceilings must be at least seven feet high and no less than 6' 4" under beams, ductwork and other protrusions. If the room has a sloped ceiling, at least one-half of the room must have a ceiling height of at least seven feet high. If a room with a sloped ceiling meets this criteria it is considered finished area, but only that portion of the room with a ceiling height of five feet or more.

If you have a finished bonus room over your garage with three foot knee walls along the sides, that portion of the room with a ceiling height of less than five feet can not be included in your finished area calculations. There are no height requirements under stairways.

The same ceiling height restrictions apply to basements. If your ceiling height of your finished basement is less than seven feet, it is not considered finished living area.

If you have both finished and unfinished areas on the same level, the unfinished area is treated just as you would a garage, regardless of where the entry to the unfinished area is located. For example, an unfinished storage room to the rear of your finished basement for which the entry is through the finished part of the basement can not be counted as finished area.

A finished area not connected to the house through a finished hallway or other finished area can not be counted towards the finished area of the house. Instead, it must be delineated separately.

Chimneys, windows and other items protruding outside of the house are not included in the finished square footage unless they have a floor on the same level. For example, a chimney running from the main level fireplace up the outside wall of both the main and second level is counted in the finished square footage of the main level only, unless there also is an hearth on the 2<sup>nd</sup> level.

*You did an outstanding job for us and we would Gladly recommend you to anyone needing a real estate agent!*

*-Clyde & Connie M. - Clayton, Georgia*

What is a level? According to the ANSI standard it is: *Areas of the house that are vertically within 2 feet of the same horizontal plane.*

### **Discrepancies**

You may find the size of your home to be different from that reported by the builder, county tax assessors, your real estate agent, or your real estate broker. Differences of 5% to 10% are often considered acceptable, depending on the complexity of the house. The more complex the house the more variance there will be between the results of individual measurements. If your home is single level four-sided box there should be little variance. If your house is a McMansion, the variance may approach the limit.

You should also remember that new home plans are often drawn and the size stated without consideration to exterior veneer. If built exactly according to plans, a new home may be slightly larger than quoted. Also be aware that new home construction does not require the same tight tolerances as say, constructing the Space Shuttle. Your home is not going to be built exactly as drawn regardless of how good your builder is.

Another reason for variances between reported sizes is differences in measuring methods. Although a national standard, there is no law requiring anyone to comply with the ANSI standards. It is completely voluntary. If someone is quoting you the size of a house, ask them if it was measured in accordance with ANSI standards. This way you are certain that when comparing houses you are comparing apples to apples.

ANSI standards apply only to single family attached and detached houses. ANSI has no standard for multi-family residential, commercial and industrial space. National organizations for those industries have their own set of standards.

Other reasons for varying results include the fact that measuring tapes tend to stretch over time (particularly fiberglass tapes), and precise measurements of a portion of the house might have been impractical due to shrubs, height, and other complexities. There are times when there are few choices other than to estimate a measurement to some degree. If you should estimate a measurement, you should note it in the description of the house when you note the size.

### **Example Descriptions**

Note, the following examples are all for houses with footprints of 1,000 square feet. (A footprint is how big the house is on the main level.)

**Example 1:** Two story home with full partially finished basement and attached two car garage and screened porch.

“Detached two-story single family house with 2,000 above grade finished square feet and 800 below grade finished square feet, plus 200 below grade unfinished square feet. Attached to the house is a 600 square foot two-car garage and a 200 square foot screened porch.”

**Example 2:** Two story home with two-story foyer.

*I appreciate all the extra effort that was necessary to hold this deal together and get it to a closing.*

*-Evan B. - Jonesboro, Georgia*

“Detached two-story single family house with 1,700 above grade finished square feet. The first level as a 300 square foot two-story foyer.”

**Example 3:** One story home with unfinished laundry room at rear of carport. (Entered through carport.)

“Detached single-story single family house with 1,000 above grade finished square feet, plus a 225 square foot single car carport with a 75 square foot unfinished laundry room off carport.”

One purpose of the ANSI standard to prevent builders and home sellers from overstating the size of the house based on space that is not generally accepted as livable or space which is below grade. To us, it is perfectly acceptable to use the following wording for Example 1 as it is not misleading in any way.

“Approximately 2,000 square foot two-story home plus part finished basement, two car garage and screened porch.”

In order to help avoid liability, we would typically add a qualifier to any statement of size. In example three we might put the word “approximately” or “about” in front of each measurement or add the statement “All sizes are approximate.”

### **Cost Does Not Matter**

Sometimes homeowners will spend just as much on their basement as they did the main level of the house and feel that it should be considered in the house size. It can be, just not lumped in as part of your finished area above grade. Basement areas must be clearly stated as basements or below grade in order not to be misleading. Regardless of their cost, a basement is a basement.

The same holds true with sun room additions. These enclosures often cost more much more per square foot than the rest of the house, but they are not included in the quoted size of the house. They are quoted separately.

### **Do You Disagree with the Standards?**

Some people do. You may see the standard as being a disadvantage now but when you are purchasing another home you will appreciate the fact that the quoted size is based on a standard methodology that yields consistent results.

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