

OTTAWA WINDOW PROS

Window Security

Locks, laminated glass, break-in resistance, and
securing ground-floor windows

10 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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Q1

Do I legally need security bars on my basement windows in Ottawa?

No, Ontario Building Code does not generally require security bars on basement windows for existing residential homes. Security bars are a personal security choice, not a standard legal requirement for homeowners.

That said, there are important code considerations that actually work *against* bars in certain situations.

Egress Requirements Are the Key Code Factor

The Ontario Building Code requires that basement bedrooms (and rooms used as sleeping areas) must have at least one window that meets **egress requirements** - meaning it must be large enough for a person to escape through in an emergency. The minimum opening is typically 0.35 m² with no dimension less than 380mm. If you install security bars on an egress window, those bars **must be openable from the inside** without tools or keys - otherwise you're creating a fire safety hazard and a code violation.

This is the one area where bars can become a legal issue. A basement rec room or storage space has more flexibility than a basement bedroom.

Ottawa-Specific Context

Ottawa doesn't have a municipal bylaw specifically mandating security bars on residential properties. Some rental properties may have additional requirements depending on the building classification, but for a standard single-family home, bars are entirely optional. If your property is a rental unit, it's worth confirming with **Ottawa Building Services** or an experienced contractor, as rental housing standards can differ.

Practical Alternatives to Consider

Many Ottawa homeowners opt for **laminated security glass**, window sensors tied to a home alarm, or **window well covers** for below-grade windows - all of which improve security without the egress complications that bars create.

If you're replacing basement windows and want to address both security and energy efficiency at the same time, that's a great opportunity to upgrade to a proper egress-compliant window with laminated glass. For a free consultation on your basement windows, Ottawa Window Pros is happy to walk you through your options.

Q2

Are sliding windows less secure than casement windows for ground floor rooms?

Sliding windows do have some security differences compared to casement windows, but the gap is smaller than most homeowners think - and both can be made very secure with the right hardware and installation.

The core difference comes down to how they lock. **Casement windows crank shut and compress against the frame**, creating a tight seal that's held closed by the crank mechanism itself. To open one from outside, an intruder would need to break the glass or defeat the locking hardware - there's no way to simply slide or pry the sash open. This makes casement windows inherently more resistant to forced entry without glass breakage.

Sliding windows operate on a track, which means they can theoretically be lifted out of the track or the latch can be manipulated if the hardware is low quality. However, modern sliding windows from reputable manufacturers address this directly. Quality sliding windows include **anti-lift pins or blocks** that prevent the sash from being lifted out of the track, and **multi-point locking systems** that engage at more than one point along the frame. A cheap sliding window with a single flip latch is a security concern - a well-built one with proper hardware is not.

For Ottawa ground floor rooms, the practical security upgrade that matters most is the quality of the window itself and how it's installed. Regardless of style, you want **reinforced locking hardware, tempered or laminated glass options, and a proper tight-fit installation** with no gaps in the frame. Some homeowners also add **secondary blocking bars** in the sliding track as an inexpensive backup measure.

If security is your primary concern for ground floor windows, casement windows do offer a slight inherent advantage. But a **high-quality sliding window installed correctly** will serve you well - the bigger security risk is usually an old, worn window with degraded hardware rather than the style itself.

If you're replacing ground floor windows and want to talk through styles and hardware, Ottawa Window Pros will connect you with installers who can show you the security options available.

Q3

Is that security film I see at Canadian Tire as good as getting actual security glass?

Security film and actual security glass are quite different products, and for most homeowners the distinction matters a lot depending on what you're trying to achieve.

Security film from Canadian Tire (typically 3M Safety Series or similar brands) is a polyester laminate that holds glass shards together when broken. It doesn't prevent the glass from breaking - it slows down entry by making it harder to clear the opening quickly. A determined intruder can still get through, but it buys time and reduces the "smash and grab" threat. It also has the side benefit of holding glass together in accidents, which is genuinely useful.

Actual security glass is a fundamentally different product. Laminated security glass bonds multiple glass layers with a tough interlayer (similar to what's in your car windshield), making it extremely difficult to penetrate even with repeated strikes. Tempered glass, by contrast, is impact-resistant but shatters into small pieces rather than holding together. True security glazing is rated to specific attack resistance standards and is used in commercial and high-security applications.

For Ottawa homeowners, the honest answer is that most residential break-ins happen through unlocked doors or by breaking a small pane to reach a lock - not by fully clearing a window opening. Security film is a reasonable, affordable deterrent for that scenario. Actual security glass makes more sense for ground-floor windows in higher-risk properties, or for the glass panels in and around entry doors.

From a practical standpoint, if your main concern is the glass in or beside your entry door, upgrading to a door with laminated security glass during a door replacement is the most cost-effective approach - you're already paying for installation anyway. Retrofitting security film yourself is a viable DIY option for other windows, though professional application gives better results without bubbles or edge gaps.

If you're considering a door or window upgrade with better security glazing built in, Ottawa Window Pros can put you in touch with an installer to go through the options.

Q4

I have a big picture window facing the street - how do I make it more secure?

Large picture windows can be secured through several effective methods, from reinforced glass to security film and proper framing upgrades. The key is layering multiple security measures rather than relying on just one approach.

Glass reinforcement is your first line of defense. Consider upgrading to laminated glass, which has a plastic interlayer that holds the glass together even when broken - similar to car windshields. This makes it extremely difficult for intruders to create an opening large enough to climb through. Tempered glass is another option that's much stronger than standard glass, though it will shatter completely when broken rather than staying intact like laminated glass.

Security window film is a cost-effective retrofit option that can be applied to your existing glass. Professional-grade security film (4-8 mil thickness) holds glass fragments together when broken and significantly delays entry attempts. While not as effective as laminated glass, it's much more affordable and can be installed without replacing the entire window. The film also provides UV protection and can reduce glare.

Frame and installation security matters just as much as the glass itself. Ensure your window frame is properly anchored to the wall structure - older installations sometimes have inadequate fastening. Consider adding security bars or decorative grilles that serve a dual purpose, though these will affect your home's appearance and emergency egress options.

In Ottawa's climate, you'll want to balance security with energy efficiency. If you're replacing the window entirely, look for laminated triple-pane units that meet ENERGY STAR requirements while providing enhanced security. The outer pane should be laminated for security, while the inner panes focus on insulation performance.

Additional security measures include motion-sensor lighting, security cameras, and alarm sensors specifically designed for glass break detection. Thorny landscaping beneath the window can also deter approach attempts while maintaining curb appeal.

For a comprehensive security assessment of your specific window and recommendations on the best approach for your situation, consider having a professional evaluation. An installer can look at where that window is vulnerable and talk through upgrades that improve security and energy efficiency together.

Q5

Does laminated glass actually stop someone from breaking in or just slow them down?

Laminated glass significantly slows down break-in attempts but won't completely stop a determined intruder. It's designed as a deterrent and delay mechanism rather than an impenetrable barrier.

How laminated glass works: The glass consists of two or more glass layers bonded with a plastic interlayer (usually PVB - polyvinyl butyral). When struck, the glass cracks but the pieces remain stuck to the plastic layer, creating a spider-web pattern instead of shattering into pieces. This makes it much harder to create an opening large enough to climb through.

Real-world effectiveness: A typical burglar expects glass to break easily and create immediate access. With laminated glass, they'll need to repeatedly strike the same area and potentially use tools to cut through the plastic layer. Most opportunistic break-ins involve quick smash-and-grab attempts, so the extra time and noise required often causes intruders to move on to easier targets. Security experts estimate laminated glass can add 1-3 minutes to a break-in attempt - which may not sound like much, but it's often enough to trigger alarms or attract attention.

In Ottawa's climate, laminated glass also provides excellent insulation and sound reduction benefits beyond security. Many homeowners choose it for ground-floor windows and patio doors where security is a concern. For maximum security, consider pairing laminated glass with quality window locks, security film, or a monitored alarm system.

Keep in mind that no glass is truly "burglar-proof" - even thick laminated security glass can eventually be defeated with enough time and the right tools. The goal is creating enough of a deterrent that intruders choose an easier target.

Q6

What's the actual difference between tempered glass and laminated glass for security?

Tempered glass and laminated glass offer completely different types of security protection - tempered glass is designed for safety when broken, while laminated glass is designed to resist breaking and intrusion attempts.

Tempered glass is heat-treated to be 4-5 times stronger than regular glass, but when it does break, it shatters into small, relatively harmless cube-shaped pieces rather than dangerous shards. This makes it excellent for safety (preventing serious cuts), but it offers minimal security benefits since the entire pane crumbles away when broken, leaving an open hole that's easy to climb through. Think of a car's side windows - they protect you from injury in an

accident but don't stop break-ins.

Laminated glass consists of two or more glass layers bonded with a plastic interlayer (usually PVB - polyvinyl butyral). When struck, the glass may crack but the pieces stay adhered to the plastic layer, maintaining a barrier even after impact. This creates a "spider web" crack pattern that significantly slows down intruders. Even with repeated strikes, laminated glass tends to bend and flex rather than create a large opening.

For Ottawa homeowners concerned about security, laminated glass is the clear choice for ground-floor windows, basement windows, and doors. It's standard in car windshields and increasingly popular in residential applications. The plastic interlayer also provides excellent sound dampening - valuable for homes near busy Ottawa streets like Bank Street or the Queensway. Laminated glass also blocks 99% of UV rays, protecting furniture and flooring.

Cost considerations in the Ottawa market show laminated glass typically adds \$50-150 per window compared to standard tempered glass, but the security and additional benefits often justify the investment for vulnerable windows.

For a look at your own vulnerable points, request a free quote through Ottawa Window Pros and ask the installer about laminated glass options.

Is there a window that's both triple-pane for energy and also hard to break into?

Yes, you can get triple-pane windows with enhanced security features that provide both excellent energy efficiency and break-in resistance. The key is combining the right glass technology with proper frame construction.

Security-enhanced triple-pane windows typically feature laminated glass in at least one of the three panes. Laminated glass has a plastic interlayer (usually PVB - polyvinyl butyral) that holds the glass together even when broken, making it much harder to penetrate. When someone tries to break laminated glass, it spider-webs but stays in the frame rather than creating an opening. This is the same technology used in car windshields.

For Ottawa homes, the most practical approach is **triple-pane windows with laminated glass on the interior pane**. This gives you the thermal performance needed for our Climate Zone 6 winters (U-factor of 0.20 or better) while providing security benefits. The outer two panes handle the primary insulation duty with Low-E coatings and argon fill, while the inner laminated pane acts as your security barrier.

Frame security is equally important - look for multi-point locking systems, reinforced sash corners, and quality hardware. Vinyl and fiberglass frames can be internally reinforced with steel or aluminum for added strength. Casement and awning windows generally offer better security than single and double-hung windows because their locking mechanisms engage at multiple points around the frame.

The cost premium for security laminated glass is typically **\$100-200 per window** over standard triple-pane. For ground-floor windows and easily accessible upper windows, this investment makes sense for both security and safety (laminated glass also provides better sound reduction and UV protection).

Request a free quote through Ottawa Window Pros and ask an installer what combination of glazing and hardware gets you both.

What kind of lock upgrades are available beyond the standard ones that come with the window?

Most residential windows come with basic latches rather than true security locks, but several upgrade options can significantly improve both security and functionality.

Standard window hardware typically includes simple cam locks on double-hung windows or basic latches on casement windows. These provide minimal security and are primarily designed to keep the window closed rather

than prevent break-ins. For homeowners looking to enhance security, there are several effective upgrade paths.

Keyed window locks are the most popular security upgrade, allowing you to lock windows with a key and remove it for added protection. These work well on double-hung, sliding, and casement windows. **Sash locks with keys** can replace standard cam locks and provide much better security than basic latches. For casement windows, **keyed casement operators** replace the standard crank handle with a locking mechanism.

Pin locks and sliding bolts offer another layer of security, particularly effective on sliding windows and patio doors. These create additional locking points that make it much harder for intruders to force windows open.

Window security bars or **stops** can also limit how far a window opens, providing security while still allowing ventilation.

In Ottawa's climate, **upgraded weatherstripping and multi-point locking systems** on newer windows not only improve security but also enhance energy efficiency by creating better seals. Many homeowners upgrading to new windows choose models with **integrated multi-point locking** that secures the window at multiple points along the frame.

Professional installation is recommended for most lock upgrades to ensure proper fit and function without compromising the window's weatherproofing. For a comprehensive security assessment of your windows and available upgrade options, request a consultation from Ottawa Window Pros to discuss solutions that work best for your specific window types and security needs.

Q9

What's the best glass option if I'm worried about break-ins on my ground floor?

Tempered glass or laminated glass are your best security options for ground floor windows, with laminated glass providing superior break-in resistance since it holds together even when shattered.

Laminated glass consists of two or more glass panes with a plastic interlayer (usually PVB) that keeps the glass intact when broken. Even if someone strikes it with a hammer, the glass will crack but remain in the frame, making it extremely difficult to create an opening large enough to climb through. This is the same technology used in car windshields and is considered the gold standard for security glazing.

Tempered glass is about four times stronger than regular glass and shatters into small, relatively harmless pieces when broken. While it's much harder to break than standard glass, once it does break, it creates an opening that could be used for entry. However, the noise and effort required often deters opportunistic break-ins.

For Ottawa homes, **laminated glass can be combined with Low-E coatings and used in double or triple-pane configurations** to maintain energy efficiency while adding security. This is particularly important given our harsh winters where you don't want to sacrifice thermal performance for security. Many homeowners choose laminated glass for their main floor windows and standard insulated glass for upper floors.

Consider pairing security glass with other measures like window locks, security film on existing windows, or motion-sensor lighting. The goal is creating multiple layers of deterrence. Quality window installation is also crucial - even the best security glass won't help if the window frame or installation is compromised.

For a look at your own ground floor windows, request a free quote through Ottawa Window Pros and ask an installer about laminated and security glazing options.

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How hard is it to add window sensors to new replacement windows?

Adding window sensors to new replacement windows is quite straightforward and much easier than retrofitting them to existing windows. The key is planning the sensor installation during the window replacement process rather than trying to add them afterward.

The best approach is to coordinate with your window installer to incorporate sensor-friendly features during installation. Most modern replacement windows can accommodate various sensor types, and your installer can ensure proper placement of mounting points, wire routing channels, and access for sensor installation. This is particularly important for hardwired security systems that may need concealed wiring run during the rough-in phase.

For wireless sensors, the installation is even simpler since there's no wiring to consider. Magnetic contact sensors can be surface-mounted on the window frame and sash after installation, while glass break sensors mount directly to the window pane. The main consideration is ensuring your new window frames have adequate flat surfaces for proper sensor mounting and that the window operation doesn't interfere with sensor placement.

In Ottawa's climate, choose sensors rated for temperature extremes since window-mounted devices experience greater temperature swings than interior sensors. Quality wireless sensors typically handle -40°C to +60°C, which covers our winter and summer conditions. Also consider that condensation on windows can affect some sensor types, so opt for moisture-resistant models.

The timing matters significantly for cost and convenience. Adding sensors during window replacement typically costs \$50-150 per window depending on the sensor type and system complexity. Retrofitting sensors later often costs more due to additional service calls and potential modifications needed for proper mounting.

For a comprehensive approach to your window replacement and security integration, request a consultation where both your window installer and security system provider can coordinate the installation timeline.

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