Luminaires (Light Fixtures) Installed in Clothes Closets

The IRC (International Residential Code) and the NEC (National Electrical Code) do not specifically require that a lighting fixture be installed in a clothes closet. If a lighting fixture is installed, however, installation requirements covered under either 2006 IRC E3903.11 or 2008 NEC article 410.2 and article 410.16 must be applied. These requirements have evolved over the years and have become more stringent due to the fire incidents that have originated in clothes closets. Consideration must be given to provide clearances from light fixtures to the storage space in a clothes closet.

A lengthy definition of “closet storage space” is provided in the code sections. Storage space is defined as, “a volume bounded by the sides and back closet walls and planes extending from the closet floor vertically to a height of 6 feet or the highest clothes-hanging rod and parallel to the walls at a horizontal distance of 24 inches from the sides and back of the closet walls respectively, and continuing vertically to the closet ceiling parallel to the walls at a horizontal distance of 12 inches or the width of the shelf, whichever is greater.”

A fixture that is installed in a clothes closet must be a surface-mounted or recessed incandescent type with all lamp(s) completely enclosed, a surface-mounted or recessed fluorescent fixture or surface mounted fluorescent or LED luminaries identified as suitable for installation within the storage area. These fixtures shall not project into the defined storage spaces as indicated by the dimensions in the diagram below.

Incandescent fixtures with open (exposed) or partially enclosed lamps, and pendant fixtures or lampholders are **not permitted** to be installed in a clothes closet. Fluorescent lights must be covered or have tube guards to prevent accidental contact.

IRC E3903.11 or NEC articles 410.8 & 410.16 Luminaries in clothes closets