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This Assistance Bulletin only applies to property within unincorporated Snohomish County and does not apply to property within incorporated city limits.

# Common Building Permit Exemptions

Assistance Bulletin

# #74

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**Keyword: Assistance Bulletins**

**Q:** What work in unincorporated Snohomish County does not require a building permit?

**A:** The following is a list of exemptions for permits. Please keep in mind though, that while you may be exempt from a building permit, you may still be required to obtain other types of permits and approvals. For example, you may not need a building permit to build a 100 square foot shed or 8-foot fence on your property, but you will still be required to meet structure setback requirements from property lines, and the structure must still comply with building code regulations.

If your property is located in a flood hazard zone, a flood hazard permit is still required regardless if a project is otherwise exempt from a building permit.

While the following may not be a complete list, it is intended to provide you with the most common permit exemptions. Check SCC 30.50.103 for the full list of exemptions from the Residential Code and Building Code of Snohomish County.

For permit information related to agricultural activities, review [AG Bulletin #1](#).

**Building and other structures** (*Permit-exempt structures are required to meet setback distances to property lines per the zoning code and setbacks/buffers to Critical Areas such as steep slopes, streams, lakes, and wetlands*).

- Agricultural buildings which are covered on the roof and sides with polyethylene, polyvinyl or similar synthetic material—size limitations are as follows:
  - 5 acres ..... 1,000 square feet
  - 10 acres ..... 2,000 square feet
  - 15 acres ..... 3,000 square feet
  - 20 acres ..... 4,000 square feet, or
  - 25 acres or more .... 5,000 square feet
- Carports and patio covers not attached to a dwelling, provided they do not exceed 200 square feet if you are located inside an Urban Growth Area (UGA) or 400 square feet if you are located outside a UGA.
- Deck steps and porches not exceeding 30 inches above grade measured vertically to the floor or *grade* below at any point within 36 inches (914 mm) horizontally to the edge of the open side.
- Fences 8 feet or less in height that do not have masonry or concrete elements above 6 feet. This height does not include wire strands on top of 8-foot fences.
 

*Note: Fences and freestanding walls six feet or less in height may be located on the property line unless a landscaped area is required.*
- Flag and light poles that do not exceed 20 feet in height.

**This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change. For complete legal information, refer to Snohomish County Code.**

- Job shacks that are placed at the job site during construction and removed upon completion of the construction.
- Membrane structures such as those used as temporary growing structures for commercial production of plants, flowers, vegetables, and fruits.
- One-story detached accessory structures not used for human habitation used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses, agricultural structures and similar structures, provided the floor area does not exceed 200 square feet if you are located inside an Urban Growth Area (UGA) or 400 square feet if you are located outside a UGA. Up to 24” roof overhang is permitted.
- Prefabricated, above ground swimming pools, 24” or less in depth, that does not exceed 5,000 gallons, and are accessory to a single family home or duplex.
- Retail stands such as espresso stands, concession stands, and fireworks stands that do not exceed 200 square feet. (May require approval from the Snohomish Health District; may be subject to driveway access regulations).
- Re-roof overlay of residential structures if limited to 2 total layers of roofing material and reroofing (tear off and replace) using the same type of roofing material provided roof sheathing is not removed or replaced.
- Retaining walls and rockeries that are 4 feet or less in height (as measured from the top of the wall to the base of the footing) that does not support a surcharge or impounds Class I, II or III-A liquids.
- Shade cloth structures for nursery or agricultural purposes.
- Swings and other playground equipment.
- Tents and canopies—tents less than 200 square feet and canopies less than 400 square feet.
- Water tanks supported on grade with a capacity of 5,000 gallons or less and where the ratio of height to diameter (or width) does not exceed 2:1.
- Window awnings for single family homes or duplexes, supported by an exterior wall that does not project more than 54” from the wall and does not require additional support of the structure.
- Window replacement—direct replacement with no structural changes.

### **Mechanical**

- Portable evaporative cooler.
- Portable heating appliances.
- Portable ventilation or cooling units.
- Propane tanks under 125 gallons. A gas piping permit is required for any interior and/or exterior gas piping installations.

### **Other**

- Demolition of a building that is being replaced with a new building in the same location and demolition is covered by the new building’s permit.
- Non-fixed and movable fixtures such as cases, racks, counters, and partitions not over 5’9” in height.
- Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, installation of cabinets or counter tops, and similar finish work.
- Removal of certain buildings typically exempt from a building permit, such as tool sheds; play houses, and similar type structures.
- Repair of plumbing leaks that does not require removal of existing traps, drain pipes, etc.
- Repair or clearing of stoppages that doesn’t involve the removal and replacement or rearrangement of valves, pipes, or fixtures.
- Replacement of exterior siding.
- Replacement of plumbing fixtures—like for like.
- Temporary movie, TV, and theater stage sets and scenery.

## **Rules for Residential Buildings Exempt from a Building Permit**

Exempt buildings include one-story\* (see next page) detached accessory structures not used for human habitation and used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses provided the floor area does not exceed 200 square feet for structures located within the Urban Growth Area (UGA) and 400 square feet for structures located outside the UGA. Free standing carports and patio covers meeting these requirements are included structures.

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If the exempt structure is to be located on property in a flood hazard zone, a flood hazard permit is required. If located within shoreline jurisdiction per RCW 90.58, compliance with the county's Shoreline Management Program is required even if no shoreline permit is required.

\*A **story** is defined as that portion of a building included between the upper surface of a floor and the upper surface of the floor or roof next above.

### **Zoning**

- Exempt structures are required to meet setback distances to property lines per zoning code and setbacks to Critical Areas such as steep slopes, streams, lakes, or wetlands.
- No setback distance is required between individual exempt structures or between exempt structures and dwellings or other permitted structures. Individual exempt structures shall be structurally independent and may not be attached to other structures.

### **Construction**

- Exempt structures must comply with building code regulations.
- Maximum 10 foot high studs may be used.
- A storage loft/mezzanine is allowed as long as the area of the loft/mezzanine area does not exceed 1/3 the building footprint.
- Eaves may extend maximum 24 inches past the exterior walls.
- Detached tool sheds and storage sheds, playhouses and similar structures exempted from permits are not required to provide wall protection (at exterior walls) based on location on the lot.
- Per Table R302.6 a garage located less than 3 feet from a dwelling unit on the same lot is required to have not less than ½-inch gypsum wall board or equivalent applied to the interior side of exterior walls that are within this area.

### **Drainage**

- Exempt structures must comply with recorded easements and covenants for, and setback requirements from stormwater management facilities including both conventional stormwater facilities and low impact development best management practices (LID BMPs) and facilities.
- Site design should consider LID principles to preserve native vegetation and minimize impervious surfaces.
- Rooftop drainage from exempt structures must not impair the function of existing stormwater facilities. Drainage improvements may be necessary to accommodate runoff from new hard surfaces. LID BMPs should be considered for stormwater management.
- Existing stormwater management facilities must be protected from damage during construction (i.e. erosion, sedimentation, or soil compaction or vegetation damage from heavy equipment or building material staging).
- Building materials and earth materials should not be staged or stored upon permeable pavement areas without proper protections.

**Q:** What if I have other questions?

**A:** Call 425.388.3311 or submit questions online at [AskPermitTech@snoco.org](mailto:AskPermitTech@snoco.org).

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