



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

A: The following list contains the most common permit exemptions. Check [SCC 30.50.103](#) for the full list of exemptions and their requirements. For permit information related to agricultural activities, review [AG Bulletin #1](#).

Please note:

- While you may be exempt from a building permit, you may 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, but you will 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.

Building and other structures

Note: 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 under the residential code and not attached to other structures/buildings, 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. See Rules for Residential Buildings Exempt from Building Permit for maximum allowable sidewall height.
- Uncovered decks (including deck steps) and uncovered porches not exceeding 30 inches above grade measured vertically from the finished deck floor to the *grade* below at any point within 36 inches (914 mm) horizontally to the edge of the open side.
- Unconditioned one-story detached accessory structures, regulated under the residential code, not used for human habitation: limited to 200 square feet inside the UGA; limited to 400 square feet outside the UGA. See Rules for Residential Buildings Exempt from Building Permit for maximum allowable sidewall 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.

- Flag and light poles that do not exceed 20 feet in height.
- 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. Fences over six feet are required to meet building setback requirements.
- Job shacks that are placed at the job site during construction and then removed.
- Membrane structures, as defined in [SCC 30.50.103](#), such as those used as temporary growing structures used solely for commercial production of plants, flowers, vegetables, and fruits.
- 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.
- Retail stands such as espresso stands, concession stands, and fireworks stands provided the floor area within the outside perimeter of the exterior walls does not exceed 200 square feet and the sidewalls do not exceed 10 feet in height, measured from average grade. Any usable area of the structure lacking exterior walls under the horizontal projection of a roof shall be included in the structure's floor area calculation. See [SCC 30.50.103](#) Structures Under the Building Code section for height limitations and building setback requirements. General rule of thumb for retail building setback is that the retail stand shall be setback 20 feet from other buildings, structures, and property lines. (May require approval from the Snohomish County Health Department; may be subject to driveway access regulations).
- 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) and that do not support a surcharge or impound Class I, II or III-A liquids.
- Prefabricated swimming pools, regulated under the residential code, that are 24" or less in depth and are accessory to a single family home or duplex.
- Swings and other playground equipment.
- Tents and canopies—tents less than 200 square feet and canopies less than 400 square feet.
- Unenclosed overhead shade cloth structures for nursery or agricultural purposes.
- 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, when the awning is supported by an exterior wall, does not project more than 54" from the wall and does not require additional support.
- Window replacement—direct replacement with no structural changes. Windows shall comply with adopted Washington State Energy Code.

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 don't require removal of existing traps, drain pipes, etc.
- Repair or clearing of stoppages that don'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 unconditioned one-story* detached accessory structures not used for human habitation and used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses, provided the floor area within the outside perimeter of the exterior walls 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. The sidewalls of an exempt structure that is regulated under the residential code and located inside the Urban Growth Area shall not exceed 9 feet, measured from the grade average. The sidewalls of an exempt structure that is regulated under the residential code and located outside of the Urban Growth Area shall not exceed 11 feet, measured from the grade average. Free standing carports and patio covers under the residential code meeting these requirements are included structures.

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.
- Structures under the residential code: No setback distance is required between individual exempt structures or between exempt structures and dwellings or other permitted structures.
- Structures under building code: General rule of thumb is that the exempt structure shall be setback 20 feet from ALL other buildings, structures, and property lines.

Construction

- Exempt structures under the residential code must comply with the residential code regulations, and possibly the building code regulations. Exempt structures under the building code must comply with the building code regulations.
- Individual exempt structures shall be structurally independent and shall not be attached to other structures.
- A storage loft is allowed as long as the area of the loft area does not exceed 1/3 the building footprint.
- Eaves may extend maximum 24 inches past the exterior walls the distance allowed into a setback under [SCC 30.23.115](#), whichever is less.
- 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.
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Q: What if I have other questions?

A: You may contact us if you have any questions via:

Online: [Ask A Permit Tech](#)

Telephone: 425-388-3311

Visit us at: 2nd Floor, Administration East, Robert J. Drewel Building, 3000 Rockefeller Avenue, Everett
