

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT POLICY/ORDINANCE
INTERPRETATION**

Interpretation No.: UNDERFLOOR-01 (Under floor or story?)
Effective Date: December 17, 2009

Question

- 1) *For planning and zoning purposes, when does the space under the floor framing qualify as an under floor, and when would it be considered a story or a habitable accessory structure?*
- 2) *What features and uses are appropriate in under floors?*

Applicable Ordinance Sections

13.10.700 –U
13.10.700- S

INTERPRETATION:

1) As defined in Section 13.10.700-U, under floors are the space between the underside of the floor framing and the grade below, and must not have interior stairway access. If an under floor has interior stairway access then it is no longer an under floor, but is instead considered another story of the house. As noted below, an under floor with extensive plumbing fixtures or area heat will no longer be considered an under floor but will instead be considered a habitable accessory structure. An under floor that is located primarily below grade may qualify as a basement rather than an under floor (See definition for “basement” and Policy Interpretation “BASEMENT-02”).

2) The following features are appropriate in under floors:

- Enclosing the under floor area
- Doors and windows
- Light fixtures and limited convenience outlets
- Mechanical equipment including furnaces and sump pumps, and associated outlets
- Water heaters and sump pumps
- Flooring required for mechanical equipment
- Sheetrock and insulation

Underfloors are not to be used as habitable space, and not to be used for sleeping purposes. Areas under the floor framing with any of the following features would no longer be considered underfloors but would instead be considered habitable accessory structures:

- Plumbing fixtures (except for a water heater, sump pump, or similar features)
- Area heat

As habitable accessory structures, these areas would be subject to the size restrictions and other limitations outlined in Section 13.10.611(c)(2).

Reason:

The definition in Section 13.10.700-U of the County Code states “To qualify as an under floor there must be no stairway access.” Therefore, an under floor with internal stairway access to the house is not longer an under floor but becomes a floor of the house, and as a floor of the house would be considered an additional story. Under floors are to be used for storage or other non-habitable uses, and are not to be used for habitable purposes. Therefore, the presence of area heating or certain plumbing fixtures that could facilitate the use of an under floor as living space would also disqualify the area as an under floor. Instead, the area between the underside of the floor framing and the grade below which lacks internal stairway access to the rest of the house but has habitable features would be considered a habitable accessory structure subject to all zoning, planning and building regulations for habitable accessory structures (see policy interpretation RES-AS-02 for further clarification).

Tom Burns, Planning Director

Date