



INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

Date: May 6, 2020

To: Risk Reduction Staff

From: Ryan Courtright, Assistant Chief

Subject: Building permits for storm shelters

The purpose of this memorandum is to clarify the building permit requirements for storm shelters, specifically those that are constructed as detached accessory structures and those that are retrofitted into and existing residential structures. As is the case with any policy, it is impossible to address every possible scenario. The following general guidance shall be used to determine if a building permit is required for a storm shelter.

Storm shelters constructed as accessory structures:

In accordance with section 105.2 of the 2018 International Residential Code, building permits are not required for single story, detached accessory structures not exceeding 200 sf in area. This section applies to detached, prefabricated, or site built storm shelters not exceeding 200 sf in area, that are constructed above or below grade. As with any accessory structure, even though a building permit may not be required, code provisions and zoning requirements must still be followed. A building permit is required for storm shelters exceeding 200 sf in area that are constructed as accessory structures.

Storm shelters located in existing structure:

There are a number of ways that a storm shelter may be retrofitted inside an existing structure. Typical installations occur in slab on grade homes in the form of a small prefabricated steel enclosure bolted to the floor slab. The storm shelter is usually located in the garage, but may be located elsewhere in the dwelling. Building permits are not required for this type of storm shelter installation.

Storm shelters may also be retrofitted below grade in an existing dwelling. This is commonly done by removing a section of the slab on grade floor, excavating below grade, and installing a prefabricated steel enclosure or constructing a site built enclosure below grade. Concerns with these types of installations include the possibility of undermining existing footings and in the case of installations in garages, the need for

shelters to be designed to support the substantial live load requirements for garage floors. Due to these significant concerns, a building permit is required for these types of installations.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

2020-XX-Courtright