Frequently Asked Questions
Storage Sheds Exempt from a Building Permit

1. What is the definition of a storage shed that is exempt from requiring a building permit?

The San Francisco Building Code (SFBC) Section 106A.2.2 defines a storage shed exempt from permit as follows:

"One-story detached accessory buildings or structures used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses, and similar uses, provided the floor area does not exceed 120 square feet (11.15 m^2). It is permissible that these structures still be regulated by Section 710A, despite exemption from permit."

2. Is a storage shed that qualifies as exempt from requiring a building permit also exempt from building code requirements?

Although a storage shed may qualify as exempt from requiring a building permit, the San Francisco Building Code (SFBC) Section 106A.2 states that work exempt from permit, including storage sheds, must meet minimum building code requirements:

"Exemptions from the permit requirements of this code shall not be deemed to grant authorization for any work to be done in any manner in violation of the provisions of this code or any other laws or ordinances of this jurisdiction."

3. What is the maximum size or area for a storage shed exempt from permit?

The maximum allowable size or area for a storage shed exempt from permit is 120 square feet (SF) of floor area per SFBC 106A.2. The floor area of a building is defined by the California Building Code (CBC) Chapter 2 Definitions as the area measured within the inside perimeter of the exterior walls.

4. What is the maximum height allowed for a storage shed exempt from permit?

The maximum allowable height for a storage shed exempt from permit is one-story per SFBC 106A.2 and not more than 10 feet high per San Francisco Planning Code Section 136(c)23, as measured from the perimeter grade of the shed to the top of the shed's roof.

5. What if a storage shed exceeds 120 square feet in floor area or is more than 10 feet high?

A storage shed that exceeds the maximum floor area of 120 square feet or the maximum height of 10 feet requires a building permit with plans and the approval of the San Francisco Planning Department and the Department of Building Inspection.

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6. How many storage sheds exempt from permit are allowed per lot or yard?

Only one storage shed exempt from permit is allowed per lot or yard. A building permit with plans would be required to approve more than one storage shed per lot or yard.

7. Can a storage shed exempt from permit be used for other purposes besides storage or as a children's playhouse?

No. The exemption from requiring a building permit is limited to a non-habitable, accessory building used for general storage, storage of tools and equipment, or as a children's playhouse. A building permit with plans is required for other types of uses.

8. Does a storage shed require a building permit when used as a habitable space?

Yes. A storage shed used as a habitable space such as, but not limited to, a home office, workshop, study room, extra bedroom, art studio, exercise room, dressing room, meditation room, bathroom, or sauna requires a building permit with plans and must meet all applicable building codes, including but not limited to Planning, Building, Mechanical, Plumbing and Electrical.

9. Can a storage shed exempt from permit be attached to the house, garage or other buildings on the lot?

No. A storage shed exempt from permit cannot be attached or connected to the house, garage or other buildings or structures on the lot.

10. Can a storage shed exempt from permit be installed on a deck above the grade of the yard?

A building permit with plans is required to install a storage shed on a deck above the grade of the yard.

11. Can a storage shed exempt from permit be installed on a roof deck?

A building permit with plans is required to install a storage shed on a roof deck.

12. What are the minimum property line setback requirements for a storage shed exempt from permit?

A minimum property line setback is not required if the storage shed is constructed with 1-hour fire rated exterior walls as specified by CBC Table 705.5.

However, a 5-foot minimum property line setback is required when the storage shed exterior walls are constructed with less than a 1-hour fire resistance rating as specified CBC Table 705.5.

13. Are there limits on the location of doors and windows for a storage shed that is exempt from permit?

Window and door openings are not allowed in storage shed exterior walls that are located less than three feet from adjacent property lines. (See CBC Table 705.9)

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14. Are there limits on the length or location of a storage shed roof overhang?

The San Francisco Planning Code limits the storage shed roof overhang to one foot.

According to CBC Table 705.2, a roof overhang cannot be located closer than two feet from an adjacent property line.

For example, a storage shed with a one-foot roof overhang would require a minimum three-foot setback from an adjacent property line.

15. Are electrical lights or outlets allowed to be installed in a storage shed that is exempt from permit?

Electrical lights and outlets may be installed in a storage shed if an electrical permit is obtained and the work is inspected and approved by a DBI Electrical Inspector.

16. Do other yard or garden structures such as a greenhouse, pergola, trellis, cabana, sauna, outside kitchen, or sunshade structures require a building permit?

Yard or garden structures such as, but not limited to, a greenhouse, pergola, trellis, cabana, sauna, outside kitchen, or sunshade structure are not exempted from requiring a building permit by SFBC 106A.2.

Building Code References:

- California Building Code (CBC) Current Edition
- San Francisco Building Code (SFBC) Current Edition

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