

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

Interpretation No.: SB-FLRAREA-01 (Straw bale structures– floor area measurement)

Effective Date: 4/7/08

Originally Issued: None

Revised: None

Question:

How should we measure the floor area, for zoning purposes, of straw bale structures or other structures constructed using alternative construction methods?

Applicable Regulatory Section(s)

§13.10.700-F

Policy Interpretation PI-01

INTERPRETATION:

For zoning purposes, the floor area of straw bale constructed structures or other structures constructed using alternative construction methods is that area within the surrounding exterior walls of a building, including the wall thickness.

Reason

The definition of Floor Area in County Code Section 13.10.700-F states: “Floor Area is that area within the surrounding exterior walls of a building, including the wall thickness....” The definition of floor area is precise and unambiguous, and is therefore not subject to interpretation. While the department supports the use of alternative construction materials that are based on sound environmental principals, we are not in a position to ignore a clear regulation. The definition allows for an accurate measurement of mass and bulk of a structure. Since the walls of straw bale structures are by necessity thicker than walls constructed using standard construction methods, a straw bale dwelling with the same “floor area” as a dwelling constructed with standard construction methods will have less interior floor space.

Tom Burns, Planning Director

Date