

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

Interpretation No.: BASEMENT – GRADING (Basement, definition for grading purposes)  
Effective Date: 02/22/10  
Originally Issued:

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**Question**

Which definition of “basement” should be used in determining whether grading for a basement is exempted from the Grading Ordinance?

**Applicable Regulatory Section(s)**

§16.20.050(c)  
§16.10.040(g)  
§13.10.700-B  
2007 CBC Section 502.1

**INTERPRETATION:**

The definition of “basement” in County Code Section 13.10.700-B shall be used when determining whether or not grading for a basement is exempt from the Grading Ordinance.

**Reason**

Regulations in the Grading Ordinance in the County Code exempt excavations for basements from requiring a grading permit (Section 16.20.050(c)). Since there is no definition for “basement” in the Grading Ordinance, the most appropriate definition is that which is consistent with local policies and regulations and the California Building Code requirements regarding grading for basements.

General Plan policies and County Code regulations require that structures be designed and constructed to minimize grading. To cite two examples, General Plan Section 6.3.9C requires foundation designs to minimize excavation or fill, and County Code Section 16.22.050(a) requires pole, step, or other types of foundations on slopes to minimize grading. The definition of basement in County Code Section 13.10.700-B is consistent with these local policies and regulations minimizing grading because it is a restrictive definition. Grading for basement areas not meeting the definition for basement in Section 13.10.700-B and requiring more than 100 cubic yards of excavation would require a grading permit, allowing Planning Staff to ensure that grading is minimized and that any adverse environmental effects are addressed.

The definition of “basement” in Chapter 16.10 is not applicable for the purpose of determining whether a grading permit is required for a basement area since the definition is primarily intended for use in administering the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The definition for basement in the 2007 California Building Code (CBC) is also not appropriate for determining whether a grading permit is required, since the definition

applies only to structural components, emergency escape, sprinklers and other aspects of a structure that are unrelated to grading.

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Tom Burns, Planning Director

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Date