

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

Interpretation No.: BASEMENT-02 (Basement or story?)
Effective Date: October 14, 2008
Revised: none

Question

For planning and zoning purposes, when are basements considered to be a story?

Applicable Ordinance Sections

13.10.700 –B
13.10.700- S

INTERPRETATION:

As is stated in Section 13.10.700, “to qualify as a basement, more than 50% of the basement exterior perimeter wall area must be below grade and no more than 20% of the perimeter exterior wall may exceed 5 feet - 6 inches above the exterior grade.” If the area beneath the floor framing exceeds these standards, then it is considered a story and is no longer considered a basement.

These criteria for determining if the area is a basement or story apply for all types of residential structures, including a single family dwelling, second unit, or an accessory structure.

Reason:

Section 13.10.700-B of the County Code clearly distinguishes between a basement and a story. For the space below the bottom of the floor framing and above the basement floor to qualify as a basement, at least 50% of the exterior wall area must be below grade, and no more than 20% of the exterior wall may exceed 5’6” above the exterior grade. The definition also states that a basement is not a story, implying that if the area below the bottom of the floor framing exceeds the limits established in 13.10.700-B for a basement, then it is a story. It should be noted that the criteria used to distinguish a basement from a story are quite different for the criteria used to distinguish between an attic and a story, which are based upon habitability (see policy interpretation ATTIC-02). Basements also differ from under floors, in that at least a portion of a basement is always below grade, whereas an under floor is at grade.

Tom Burns, Planning Director

Date