

Virginia Residential Code Requirements Pertaining to Accessory Structures

(all code sections are taken from the 2015 Virginia Residential Code)

Sections/portions of sections that have been highlighted in **yellow** are considered most applicable to accessory structures, however, the sections have been shown in their entirety to avoid any confusion as to how the sections read. All text written in **red** is actual code language, text in black has been inserted for clarification.

When Permits are Required:

SECTION 108 APPLICATION FOR PERMIT

108.1 When applications are required.

Application for a permit shall be made to the building official and a permit shall be obtained prior to the commencement of any of the following activities, except that applications for emergency construction, alterations or equipment replacement shall be submitted by the end of the first working day that follows the day such work commences. In addition, the building official may authorize work to commence pending the receipt of an application or the issuance of a permit.

1. Construction or demolition of a building or structure. Installations or alterations involving (i) the removal or addition of any wall, partition or portion thereof, (ii) any structural component, (iii) the repair or replacement of any required component of a fire or smoke rated assembly, (iv) the alteration of any required means of egress system, (v) water supply and distribution system, sanitary drainage system or vent system, (vi) electric wiring, (vii) fire protection system, mechanical systems, or fuel supply systems, or (viii) any equipment regulated by the USBC.
2. For change of occupancy, application for a permit shall be made when a new certificate of occupancy is required under Section 103.3.
3. Movement of a lot line that increases the hazard to or decreases the level of safety of an existing building or structure in comparison to the building code under which such building or structure was constructed.
4. Removal or disturbing of any asbestos containing materials during the construction or demolition of a building or structure, including additions.

Exemptions from application for permits. Note that the bold underlined portion of this section is saying that while the items listed are exempt from having to apply for a permit, they are still subject to other applicable requirements of the code so the owner or builder is still responsible for things such as wind load design, snow and other design loads.

108.2 Exemptions from application for permit.

Notwithstanding the requirements of Section 108.1, application for a permit and any related inspections shall not be required for the following; **however, this section shall not be construed to exempt such activities from other applicable requirements of this code.** In addition, when an owner or an owner's agent requests that a permit be issued for any of the following, then a permit shall be issued and any related inspections shall be required.

1. Installation of wiring and equipment that (i) operates at less than 50 volts, (ii) is for network powered broadband communications systems, or (iii) is exempt under Section 102.3(1), except when any such installations are located in a plenum, penetrate fire rated or smoke protected construction or are a component of any of the following:

1.1. Fire alarm system.

1.2. Fire detection system.

1.3. Fire suppression system.

1.4. Smoke control system.

1.5. Fire protection supervisory system.

1.6. Elevator fire safety control system.

1.7. Access or egress control system or delayed egress locking or latching system.

1.8. Fire damper.

1.9. Door control system.

2. One story detached structures used as **tool and storage sheds, playhouses or similar uses**, provided the building area does not exceed 256 square feet (23.78 m²) and the structures are not classified as a Group F-1 or H occupancy.

3. Detached prefabricated buildings housing the equipment of a publicly regulated utility service, provided the floor area does not exceed 150 square feet (14 m²).

4. Tents or air-supported structures, or both, that cover an area of 900 square feet (84 m²) or less, including within that area all connecting areas or spaces with a common means of egress or entrance, provided such tents or structures have an occupant load of 50 or less persons.

5. Fences of any height unless required for pedestrian safety as provided for by Section 3306, or used for the barrier for a swimming pool.

6. Concrete or masonry walls, provided such walls do not exceed 6 feet (1829 mm) in height above the finished grade. Ornamental column caps shall not be considered to contribute to the height of the wall and shall be permitted to extend above the 6 feet (1829 mm) height measurement.

7. Retaining walls supporting less than 3 feet (914 mm) of unbalanced fill that are not constructed for the purpose of impounding Class I, II or III-A liquids or supporting a surcharge other than ordinary unbalanced fill.

8. Swimming pools that have a surface area not greater than 150 square feet (13.95 m²), do not exceed 5,000 gallons (19 000 L) and are less than 24 inches (610 mm) deep.

9. Signs under the conditions in Section H101.2 of Appendix H.

10. Replacement of above-ground existing LP-gas containers of the same capacity in the same location and associated regulators when installed by the serving gas supplier.

11. Flagpoles 30 feet (9144 mm) or less in height.

12. Temporary ramps serving dwelling units in Group R-3 and R-5 occupancies where the height of the entrance served by the ramp is no more than 30 inches (762 mm) above grade.

13. Construction work deemed by the building official to be minor and ordinary and which does not adversely affect public health or general safety.

14. Ordinary repairs that include the following:

14.1. Replacement of windows and doors with windows and doors of similar operation and opening dimensions that do not require changes to the existing framed opening and that are not required to be fire rated in Group R-2 where serving a single dwelling unit and in Groups R-3, R-4 and R-5.

14.2. Replacement of plumbing fixtures and well pumps in all groups without alteration of the water supply and distribution systems, sanitary drainage systems or vent systems.

14.3. Replacement of general use snap switches, dimmer and control switches, 125 volt-15 or 20 ampere receptacles, luminaires (lighting fixtures) and ceiling (paddle) fans in Group R-2 where serving a single dwelling unit and in Groups R-3, R-4 and R-5.

14.4. Replacement of mechanical appliances provided such equipment is not fueled by gas or oil in Group R-2 where serving a single-family dwelling and in Groups R-3, R-4 and R-5.

14.5. Replacement of an unlimited amount of roof covering or siding in Groups R-3, R-4 or R-5 provided the building or structure is not in an area where the design (3 second gust) wind speed is greater than 100 miles per hour (160 km/hr) and replacement of 100 square feet (9.29 m²) or less of

roof covering in all groups and all wind zones.

14.6. Replacement of 100 square feet (9.29 m²) or less of roof decking in Groups R-3, R-4 or R-5 unless the decking to be replaced was required at the time of original construction to be fire-retardant-treated or protected in some other way to form a fire-rated wall termination.

14.7. Installation or replacement of floor finishes in all occupancies.

14.8. Replacement of Class C interior wall or ceiling finishes installed in Groups A, E and I and replacement of all classes of interior wall or ceiling finishes in other groups.

14.9. Installation or replacement of cabinetry or trim.

14.10. Application of paint or wallpaper.

14.11. Other repair work deemed by the building official to be minor and ordinary which does not adversely affect public health or general safety.

15. Crypts, mausoleums, and columbaria structures not exceeding 1,500 square feet (139.35 m²) in area if the building or structure is not for occupancy and used solely for the interment of human or animal remains and is not subject to special inspections.

Exception: Application for a permit may be required by the building official for the installation of replacement siding, roofing and windows in buildings within a historic district designated by a locality pursuant to Section 15.2-2306 of the Code of Virginia.

When wood and wood based products are required to be protected from decay:

SECTION R317 PROTECTION OF WOOD AND WOOD BASED PRODUCTS AGAINST DECAY

R317.1 Location required.

Protection of wood and wood based products from decay shall be provided in the following locations by the use of naturally durable wood or wood that is preservative-treated in accordance with AWPA U1 for the species, product, preservative and end use. Preservatives shall be listed in Section 4 of AWPA U1.

1. Wood joists or the bottom of a wood structural floor when closer than 18 inches (457 mm) or wood girders when closer than 12 inches (305 mm) to the exposed ground in crawl spaces or unexcavated area located within the periphery of the building foundation.

2. All wood framing members that rest on concrete or masonry exterior foundation walls and are less than 8 inches (203 mm) from the exposed ground.

3. Sills and sleepers on a concrete or masonry slab that is in direct contact with the ground unless separated from such slab by an impervious moisture barrier.

4. The ends of wood girders entering exterior masonry or concrete walls having clearances of less than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (12.7 mm) on tops, sides and ends.

5. Wood siding, sheathing and wall framing on the exterior of a building having a clearance of less than 6 inches (152 mm) from the ground or less than 2 inches (51 mm) measured vertically from concrete steps, porch slabs, patio slabs, and similar horizontal surfaces exposed to the weather.

6. Wood structural members supporting moisture-permeable floors or roofs that are exposed to the weather, such as concrete or masonry slabs, unless separated from such floors or roofs by an impervious moisture barrier.

7. Wood furring strips or other wood framing members attached directly to the interior of exterior masonry walls or concrete walls below *grade* except where an *approved* vapor retarder is applied between the wall and the furring strips or framing members.

Foundation/footing requirements:

SECTION R403 FOOTINGS

R403.1 General.

All exterior walls shall be supported on continuous solid or fully grouted masonry or concrete footings, wood foundations, or other approved structural systems that shall be of sufficient design to accommodate all loads according to Section R301 and to transmit the resulting loads to the soil within the limitations as determined from the character of the soil. Footings shall be supported on undisturbed natural soils or engineered fill.

Exceptions:

1. One-story detached accessory structures used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses, **not exceeding 256 square feet (23.7824 m²) of building area, provided all of the following conditions are met:**

1.1. The building eave height is 10 feet or less.

1.2. The maximum height from the finished floor level to grade does not exceed 18 inches.

1.3. The supporting structural elements in direct contact with the ground shall be placed level on firm soil and **when such elements are wood they shall be approved pressure preservative treated suitable for ground contact use.**

1.4. The structure is anchored to withstand wind loads as required by this code.

1.5. The structure shall be of light-frame construction whose vertical and horizontal structural elements are primarily formed by a system of repetitive wood or light gauge steel framing members,

with walls and roof of light weight material, not slate, tile, brick or masonry.

2. Footings are not required for ramps serving dwelling units in Group R-3 and R-5 occupancies where the height of the entrance is no more than 30 inches (762 mm) above grade.

When frost depth footings are required and minimum footing depths:

R403.1.4 Minimum depth.

All exterior footings shall be placed at least 12 inches (305 mm) below the undisturbed ground surface. Where applicable, the depth of footings shall also conform to Sections R403.1.4.1 through R403.1.4.2.

R403.1.4.1 Frost protection.

Except where otherwise protected from frost, foundation walls, piers and other permanent supports of buildings and structures shall be protected from frost by one or more of the following methods:

1. Extended below the frost line specified in Table R301.2.(1):

City of Harrisonburg frost depth is 30 inches

2. Constructing in accordance with Section R403.3;
3. Constructing in accordance with ASCE 32; or
4. Erected on solid rock.

Exceptions:

1. Protection of freestanding *accessory structures* with an area of 600 square feet (56 m²) or less, of light-frame construction, with an eave height of 10 feet (3048 mm) or less shall not be required.

The minimum footer depth found in section R403.1.4 of 12 inches still applies.

2. Protection of freestanding *accessory structures* with an area of 400 square feet (37 m²) or less, of other than light-frame construction, with an eave height of 10 feet (3048 mm) or less shall not be required.
3. Decks not supported by a dwelling need not be provided with footings that extend below the frost line.