



# Exempt Remodels

## Bulletin # 10

Department of Planning and Land Services, June 2007  
Division of Building Safety and Inspection for 2006 I Codes

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As noted in Bulletin 8, some residential remodel work is exempt from a building permit. In the Pierce County Code, Section 17C.90.040, item 13 states:

13. Minor construction and alteration activities to Group R, Division 3 and Group U, Division 1, as classified by the building official, PROVIDED:

- a. That the construction and/or alteration activity does not affect any structural components, or reduce existing egress, light, air, energy and ventilation conditions.
- b. That the construction and/or alteration activity does not exceed 500 square feet for Group R, Division 3 and 1,000 square feet for Group U, Division 1, in any 12 month period.
- c. This exemption does not include electrical, plumbing or mechanical activities.
- d. The permit exemption shall not otherwise exempt the construction or alteration from complying with the substantive standards of the codes enumerated in RCW 19.276.031, as amended and maintained by the State Building Code Council under RCW 19.27.074.
- e. Unless otherwise exempted, separate plumbing, mechanical, and electrical permits will be required for the above exempted work.

**All remodels that are exempt from a building permit  
have the following condition:**

"Exemption 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 Pierce County."

This means that you are still required to follow all code requirements for kind of material, connections, size of framing members, and other required permits.

As noted, this local amendment allows for 500 square feet of remodel in a house and 1,000 square feet in a garage. Here are two examples:

**1. Remodeling of a large master bedroom into 2 bedrooms does not require a building permit if it meets all the conditions noted above.**

**However!** The conversion requires installation of egress windows and smoke detectors if they are not there. No permit is required for the windows unless there is a change in the size of a header. Adding electrical, heating or plumbing would require a permit. Adding a bedroom also requires approval from the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department if the building is served by an on-site sewage system.

Gas appliances are not allowed in bedrooms and may not be accessed through a bedroom. Also, they may not be enclosed and their source of combustion air must be maintained.

**2. Remodeling a garage to provide for a hobby room does not require a building permit.**

**However!** The creation of the hobby area may pose some unique problems.

1. Heating the space will normally require adding insulation and energy efficient windows and doors.
2. A Mechanical permit is required to install a second or larger furnace. Gas appliances may not be enclosed and their source of combustion air must be maintained.
3. Electrical permits are required for any additional lighting and power outlets.

**EXCEPTION: Converting the garage to living space requires a building permit.**

The exception from a permit does not include a change of use. You can do some remodeling in your garage but it must remain a garage or storage space. When you change the basic use of the garage to a house or other habitable space it is considered a change of use and a building permit is required.

Converting the garage to a family room or other habitable rooms is a common request. **You will need to consider:**

1. Heating the space will normally require adding insulation and energy efficient windows and doors.
2. A Mechanical permit is required to install a second or larger furnace. Gas appliances may not be enclosed and their source of combustion air must be maintained.
3. Electrical permits are required for any additional lighting and power outlets.