



**SAN JUAN COUNTY
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING**

135 RHONE STREET, P.O. BOX 947 FRIDAY HARBOR, WA. 98250
(360) 378-2354 (360) 378-2116 FAX (360) 378-3922
CDP@SANJUANCO.COM | WWW.SANJUANCO.COM

POLICY

YURTS

**JOHN GENIUCH
BUILDING OFFICIAL**

**NUMBER BP-2014-02
ISSUED JULY 18, 2014**

ISSUE:

A number of manufacturers produce and sell a cloth/membrane tent known as a “yurt”. These structures have been touted as an economical means of housing, among other uses. What are the limits and permissible uses of a yurt in San Juan County?

RELEVANT CODE CITATIONS:

When discussing allowable uses for yurts and permitting considerations, the code sections presented below would apply:

From the 2012 International Building Code (IBC) Washington State Amendments:

108.1 General. The building official is authorized to issue a permit for temporary structures and temporary uses. Such permits shall be limited as to time of service, but shall not be permitted for more than 180 days. The building official is authorized to grant extensions for demonstrated cause.

Exception: The building official may authorize unheated tents and yurts under 500 square feet accommodating an R-1 occupancy for recreational use as a temporary structure and allow them to be used indefinitely.

From the 2012 International Building Code (IBC)

310.3 Residential Group R-1. Residential occupancies containing *sleeping units* where the occupants are primarily *transient* in nature, including: *Boarding houses (transient)* with more than 10 occupants; *Congregate living facilities (transient)* with more than 10 occupants; *Hotels (transient)*; *Motels (transient)*

From the 2012 International Residential Code (IRC):

R101.2 Scope. The provisions of the *International Residential Code for One- and Two-family Dwellings* shall apply to the construction, *alteration*, movement, enlargement, replacement, repair, equipment, use and occupancy, location, removal and demolition of detached one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses not more than three stories above *grade plane* in height with a separate means of egress and their *accessory structures*.

R107.1 General. The *building official* is authorized to issue a *permit* for temporary structures and temporary uses. Such permits shall be limited as to time of service, but shall not be permitted for more than 180 days. The *building official* is authorized to grant extensions for demonstrated cause.

R107.2 Conformance. Temporary structures and uses shall conform to the structural strength, fire safety, means of egress, light, ventilation and sanitary requirements of this code as necessary to ensure the public health, safety and general welfare.

R303.9 Required heating. When the winter design temperature in Table R301.2(1) is below 60°F , every *dwelling unit* shall be provided with heating facilities capable of maintaining a minimum room temperature of 68°F at a point 3 feet above the floor and 2 feet from exterior walls in all habitable rooms at the design temperature. The installation of one or more portable space heaters shall not be used to achieve compliance with this section.

From the 2012 Washington State Energy Code (WSEC):

R101.2 Scope. This code applies to *residential buildings* and the buildings sites and associated systems and equipment. This code shall be the maximum and minimum energy code for residential construction in each town, city and county.

ANALYSIS:

Reviewing the above reference code citations, in context, several things are clear:

- 1) Yurts (cloth/membrane type) are a form of a tent.
- 2) The building codes address permanent and temporary use of structures in general and, more specifically, yurts and membrane structures.
- 3) The intent of the IRC is to provide minimum safety standards for construction of residential structures.
- 4) Structures used for human habitation require a minimum level of heating.
- 5) The WSEC contains minimum energy code requirements for residential occupancies.
- 6) While provisions for “temporary” structures exist in the code, there is typically a finite amount of time attached to their use. Additionally, they are required to meet the same basic minimum life safety, structural, and efficiency requirements of permanent structures.

POLICY:

Cloth/Fabric yurts are allowed to be installed and used in accordance with the following provisions:

- 1) Installation and use of a yurt, less than 500 square feet, as a camping or similar recreational tent is allowed as an R1 occupancy, after applying for a permit. This use is limited to occupants that are “transient” in nature and would include campgrounds and similar small for rent recreational facilities. Use on a residential lot (1 or 2 family) would not be allowed under these provisions.

- 2) Installation and use of yurts larger than 500 square feet as camping or similar recreational tents is allowed as an R1 occupancy when a permit is applied for an approved.
 - a. R1 occupancies greater than 500 square feet require automatic fire suppression.
- 3) Installation and use of an unheated yurt on a one or two family residential property is allowed provided:
 - a. The use is limited to storage only.
 - b. A permit is applied for and approved unless:
 - i. The projected roof area is 400 square feet or less, or:
 - ii. An Owner Builder Exemption is applied for and approved for storage uses up to 1,000 square feet.
 - c. The proposed structure is shown to comply with structural design requirements.
- 4) Installation and use of a yurt on a one or two family residential property for living, camping, sleeping, office space, and other similar habitable uses, is allowed provided all of the following conditions are met:
 - a. A permit is applied for and approved.
 - b. The structure and supporting platform are provided with an engineered design showing capability of resisting all required design loads (seismic and wind).
 - i. Exception: Yurts permitted under the Owner Builder Ordinance are not required to demonstrate compliance with structural design requirements.
 - c. The yurt is provide with an indirect heat source that meets the minimum heating requirements described in IRC R303.9, with the following conditions:
 - i. Installation of a direct heat source is prohibited. (Wood/pellet stove, propane stove, electric radiant heat and similar).
 - ii. Any indirect heat source must first be approved by the Building Official. Examples would include radiant heat tubing in the tent platform with the primary heat source a minimum of 10 feet from the yurt, forced air with the main unit 10 feet from the unit, or other approved alternatives.
 - d. The yurt is modified to comply with all current energy codes mandated by the state for residential occupancies.
- 5) Installation of any yurt is subject to compliance with all other applicable codes, laws, rules and regulations.

The Building Official may make modifications to this policy at any time.