



**SAN JUAN COUNTY  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING**

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**POLICIES / PROCEDURES / INTERPRETATIONS**

**FENCE HEIGHT**

**JOHN GENIUCH  
DEPUTY BUILDING OFFICIAL**

**NUMBER: BP-2013-01  
ISSUED: JUNE 10, 2013**

**ISSUE:**

Current adopted building codes (2009 IRC & 2009 IBC) have provisions for “work exempt from a permit”, which includes, among other items, “fences not more than 6 feet in height”. Upcoming 2012 code changes have increased this threshold to 7 feet. SJC Building Division, in preparing the revised code adoption ordinance, has drafted a local amendment to increase this threshold further, to 8 feet. How should current proposals by citizens who desire to build an 8 foot fence be addressed?

**ANALYSIS:**

The code development process has recognized that no substantial difference between a 6 foot and 7 foot fence exists, from a life safety point of view. When considering construction of fences, 3 main issues arise. First is location on lot (setbacks). Next would be potential damage from a structural failure. The third concern is during a substantial wind event, one approaching design thresholds, fences can become airborne projectiles, potentially endangering surrounding property and occupants.

San Juan County is located in the lowest design wind speed zone. The adopted codes and proposed revisions to the County Code include allowances for 8 foot tall fences to be constructed without a permit. The idea has been presented to the Building Advisory Council and was well received, with no concerns raised or identified. Given the proposed changes and lower general intensity of wind events in the islands, a 2 foot increase in the unpermitted fence threshold height would not present any substantial concerns for public safety.

**POLICY:**

- Fences up to 8 feet in height are allowed to be constructed without a permit.
- An unpermitted fence shall be designed and constructed to resist all potential imposed loads from wind or seismic events.
- Fences, regardless of height, constructed within the 200 foot shoreline jurisdiction may require a permit and are subject to review and approval by CDPD.
- Fences are exempt from setback requirements, except when impairing safe sight lines at intersections, as determined by the County engineer. [1]

[1] UDC 18.60.050 Table 6.1 & 6.2 footnote 4