

# Richland County Health Department

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**Policy Topic:** Identifying a bedroom to determine wastewater design flow

**Policy:** The Richland County Health Department will utilize consistent definitions to determine whether a room qualifies as a bedroom in the wastewater design flow.

**Effective/Review Date:** May 20, 2017; January 9, 2019; December 30, 2019, January 22, 2022, February 2023, December 2023

**Purpose: To define a process to identify the number of bedrooms in a building to determine wastewater design flow.**

**Responsible Party:** Sanitarian

**Procedure:**

1. The Richland County Sanitarian will review the proposed plans or current design of a building that is or will be connected to a wastewater system to determine the number of bedrooms to determine wastewater design flow. Richland County will use the following definitions:

*Current room use:* A room that has been or is currently being used as a sleeping room, even if not constructed to the current building code standards, will be counted as a bedroom. The Department can make exceptions to this requirement if the use is temporary (For example, weekend house guests sleeping on a pull out in a den).

*Unfinished basement:* If the basement will be unfinished at the time of permitting, it will be counted as one additional bedroom. If the basement is later finished, a permit for increased use will be required if the basement is proposed to have more bedrooms than allowed by the current septic permit.

*Potential use:* A room that is not used for sleeping currently, but may be used for sleeping in the future, will be considered a bedroom under the following conditions:

- a. It is labeled as a bedroom on the floor plans; or
- b. It has a window or a door to the outside (regardless of whether the egress is legal by building department standards) and it has the expected degree of privacy typical of a bedroom; or
- c. It is an open loft area and no other rooms have access off of it; or
- d. It is a room with a downward-tapering ceiling with at least 70 square feet, not counting any areas where the ceiling is less than 5' tall.

A room that is not used for sleeping or labeled as a bedroom will not be counted as a bedroom under the following circumstances:

- a. It is obviously a kitchen, bathroom, living room, dining room, laundry room, storage room (with no windows or with ceilings less than 5' tall), utility room or family room.

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- b. It has a doorway that lacks a door, half walls, or other architectural features that limit privacy or use as a bedroom (such as sloped floors in a home theater)
- c. It has no egress or source of light to the outside
- d. It is used as passage to other rooms, stairs, or bathrooms unless this is the only sleeping area in the dwelling
- e. It is not finished living space, such as a storage shed, potting shed, greenhouse, or shop

*Buildings not connected to water or septic:* A separate building without plumbing or running water may be considered as one or more additional bedrooms to a structure with plumbing or running water. Examples include a bunkhouse or artist studio.

### **Quick Reference Table**

The table below is intended to be used as a reference by the Department, when determining whether a room (that's not currently being used for sleeping) should be counted as a bedroom for the purpose of septic system sizing. The Department will make a decision based on all available information and a single item (whether an obstacle or support) might not disqualify a room from being counted as a bedroom.

Obstacles to a Bedroom Designation	Support for Bedroom Designation
The room is obviously a kitchen, bathroom, living room, dining room, laundry room, storage room (without windows) or family room.	Legal Egress
Large entryway, no door, half walls, or other features that limit privacy.	Has a closet
Low Ceilings	Area greater than 70 sf
No Source of ventilation or lighting from the outside	Currently used as a bedroom
Rooms that are used as a passage to other uses	Defined as a bedroom by Assessor or building plans
Open lofts that lead to other rooms	Rooms adjacent to bathroom
Room with mechanical facilities or laundry plumbing connections	Rooms in accessory buildings without plumbing
Room in separate building that is not finished living space, such as storage shed or greenhouse	

### **NOTES:**

**Expected Privacy:** This term is difficult to define. The maximum level of privacy of a room could offer is if it has four walls and a closable door. However, the absence of one of those components does not necessarily limit the expected privacy to a degree in which the room could not be reasonably used as a bedroom. For instance, an expanded entryway such as a wide archway with no door *can* remove a room's ability to offer privacy, but that archway must be located in such a way that the room becomes open to the adjacent portion of the home. Conversely, the same door-less entryway could exist, but could be positioned so that you enter the room and then turn 90 degrees to continue further into the room. Picture a public restroom that has been designated so that there are no doors in the entry. While entering, one makes a series of turns that create a

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degree of expected privacy. This is why the department looks closely at the details of interior layouts when determining the level of expected privacy, and each case is a little bit different.

**Lofts:** Lofts do not have four walls, but are elevated above the rest of the living space. More often than not, a bed can be tucked away so that it is not visible to those in the living room or kitchen. In addition, the vast majority of lofts we have come across are used as sleeping space. This is especially true in recreational cabins where, although seasonal, use is generally high for short periods and sleeping space is generally limited. All that said, a loft will not be counted as a bedroom if there is a clear reason that it would unlikely to be used for sleeping. Examples include a loft that serves as an entryway into another room or rooms, or one that has less than 70 square feet.

**Limitation/Disclaimer:** This definition of “bedroom” is only applicable when estimating wastewater flow from a dwelling. It cannot be used to determine the adequacy or safety of a room for sleeping purposes. For adequacy and safety requirements, please contact the applicable building department.

## **Forms: None**



Reference: Missoula County Health Code/Regulation 1/ “Wastewater Treatment and Disposal”/ Appendix F/ “Identifying Bedrooms To Determine Wastewater Design Flow”.