

Mendocino County Division of Environmental Health

Policy 4200.04

BEDROOM DEFINITION

CRA REVISION/6/28/26

WCPB's annotations 7.30.2026

Intent and Benefit

To establish a consistent ~~and code-compliant~~ definition of a bedroom for use in environmental health, occupancy determinations, program compliance, and to ensure alignment with on-site wastewater system design capacity and public health standards.

This policy definition is intended to size the on-site sewage system to the number of **potential** bedrooms ~~proposed~~ in the residence regardless of how any particular resident might be utilizing the structure at any given point in time. This definition will provide a common ~~language~~ **definition** for the discussion of residential structure size as it relates to the sizing of the on-site sewage system.

Background Information

Various informal definitions of a bedroom have been used in the past. This has led to ~~confusion and~~ a lack of consistency among EH staff, ~~relating to the review of building permits~~. The County building department does not have a definition ~~for~~ of a bedroom and thus ~~the~~ **this** policy is necessary for purposes of sizing on-site sewage systems. ~~An objective realistic~~ definition of room utilization is needed to ensure the number of **potential** bedrooms in a residence is the same number of bedrooms accounted for in the sizing of the on-site sewage system.

~~Statement of Problem~~

ADD THIS LANGUAGE:

As of the date of this policy, the average number of persons per dwelling unit in Mendocino County is 2.2; the California state average is 2.7 persons per dwelling unit.

COMMENT: How often are septic systems failing because they are undersized for the number of people using a house? Septic systems fail because of age and/or changed site conditions (compaction of system, etc.).

~~Applicants apply for a building application siting a different number of bedrooms than those listed in the on-site sewage system plans. In order to release a building application, the two need to match. Having a clear definition of how to count bedrooms is needed to ensure consistent submissions and reviews.~~

What is the problem? In all of our meetings thus far, this has not clearly been communicated.

During the EH review of building permits, EH is assuming that occupancy of the house will be greater than the applicant is acknowledging, due to the concept of EH's 'potential bedrooms'. This concern regarding future potential use is driving the policy. The review of occupancy figures per dwelling unit (in the county, state and nation) show that this is not occurring.

Details of Policy Procedures

This policy shall be applied to the permitting of new residences. This policy shall not be applied to repair/replacement system designs, for existing pre-code uses (acknowledged by the Assessors office) nor for existing permitted post-74 uses.

A bedroom, for purposes of sizing on-site sewage systems, shall be defined as: any room with legal egress (as defined by the California Building Code) that is designated by applicant as a “bedroom”; ~~other rooms, such as sewing rooms, dens, offices, studios, lofts, game rooms, etc. shall also be considered as bedrooms.~~ For the purposes of this policy, a tiny home is at least one bedroom.

Room features must be clearly labeled on the floor plans submitted to Mendocino County Planning and Building Services (PBS) to ensure proper evaluation.

Rooms having one or more of the following features shall **not** be considered by the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) to constitute a bedroom:

1. A 4-foot wide or greater ~~arched~~ frameless doorway without a door which opens onto the entry way or a main activity area.
2. If the space uses a half wall or railing along at least one side of the room.
3. If the space is a loft **without** its own independent full bathroom.
4. If the space is 70 square feet or less.
5. If the space is an interior room that must be passed through to access another bedroom.
6. If the space is not a **directly conditioned space***.

~~In the case of existing homes for which the number of bedrooms is unknown, but the square footage of the structure is known, EH will assume the following bedroom counts unless a floor plan for the structure is submitted:~~

Gross Floor Area No. of Bedrooms

~~0—1500 SF 1
1501—2100 SF 2
2101—3000 SF 3
Over 3001 SF 4~~

~~Plans may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the EH department, when it is not clear as to whether or not a room is a bedroom.~~

A review of building plans to determine the appropriate number of bedrooms associated with a project can be requested of the EHD, on a case by case basis.

* For the purposes of this policy, **directly** conditioned space is defined as follows:

- ~~1. An area or room within a building being heated or cooled containing uninsulated related ducts or with a fixed opening directly into an adjacent conditioned space.~~
- ~~2. A space is conditioned if it is heated or cooled directly or where a space is indirectly~~

~~supplied with heating or cooling through uninsulated walls, floors or uninsulated ducts or heating, ventilating and air-conditioning (HVAC) piping.~~

- ~~3. A cooled space is an enclosed space within a building that is cooled by a cooling system whose sensible output capacity exceeds 5 Btu/h-ft² of floor area.~~
4. A directly conditioned space is an enclosed space that is provided with:
 - a. Wood heating
 - b. Mechanical heating that has a capacity exceeding 10 Btu/hr-ft²
 - c. Mechanical cooling that has a capacity exceeding 5 Btu/hr-ft²

~~Conditioned space is defined as “an enclosed space within a building that is directly conditioned or indirectly conditioned.”~~

~~A directly conditioned space generally includes an enclosed space provided with wood heating, mechanical heating exceeding 10 Btu/hr per square foot, or mechanical cooling exceeding 5 Btu/hr per square foot. Process spaces are excluded from this definition.~~

~~A space may also be considered indirectly conditioned when it is not directly heated or cooled but is substantially open or thermally connected to an adjacent conditioned space, or when conditioned air is intentionally transferred into the space at a rate exceeding three air changes per hour.~~

~~Unconditioned space is defined as an enclosed space within a building that is not conditioned space per the definition outlined in Section 100.1 of the California Energy Code, Title 24, Part 6.~~

Effective Date: July 1, 2007

Revised Date: July 30, 2026

Director’s Initials: