



**HOW TO OBTAIN A PERMIT FOR  
Private Swimming Pools, Spas, Hot Tubs**

**City of San Diego  
Development Services Department**

**INFORMATION  
BULLETIN  
712**

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The intent of this bulletin is to explain the permitting process for the installation or removal of private swimming pools in the City of San Diego. A private pool is any constructed pool, permanent or portable, which is intended for non-commercial use as a swimming pool by not more than three owner families and their guests. The provisions of this bulletin apply to private swimming pools, spas and hot tubs serving single-family homes or duplexes classified as Group R, Division 3 Occupancies. All private swimming pools should comply with this bulletin along with requirements specified in Section 3109 of the California Building Code (CBC), Chapter 14, Article 5, Division 31 of San Diego Municipal Code (SDMC), the California Swimming Pool Safety Act and the International Swimming Pool and Spa Code.

Public swimming pools, such as pools in apartment and condominium complexes, hotels and motels, exercise gyms, resorts and recreation facilities are regulated by the County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health and Chapter 31B of the California Building Code. Public swimming pools are beyond the scope of this bulletin.

**I. POOL DESIGN OPTIONS**

The City of San Diego Development Services Department has established master plans for certain pool designs in order to expedite the review of standard pools. For information concerning how to establish a master plan for miscellaneous structures such as pools, refer to Information Bulletin 114a. The following sections describe the requirements and limitations for submitting a Master Plan or a Custom Pool.

**A. Master Plan Pools**

A swimming pool, spa or hot tub may be permitted and constructed utilizing a City pre-approved and established master plan. The applicant must submit the pre-approved master plans, details and specifications with the site plan and architectural plans (sections and elevations) necessary for a building permit. When considering submitting a master plan pool, the following criteria must be met:

1. Height of the soil retained behind the pool wall shall not exceed six (6) feet. This height is measured from the bottom of the pool to top of the adjacent grade. The height of the bond beam added on top of the wall of the pool shall be added to the depth of the pool to determine the overall height of the soil being retained.
2. The scope of work on the cover sheet shall state use of the City-approved master plan and the project number for the master plan.
3. The site plan and all sheets of drawings, specifications, and details shall bear the approval registration stamp and signature of the California registered Civil or Structural Engineer or licensed architect of record.
4. The proposed pool/spa shall be site specific and clearly identify and reference the details and pool depths being constructed on all sides. All details and tables or portions of tables not used for the proposed pool shall be crossed-out and marked 'Omit'.
5. The pool must be constructed to the exact specifications stated in the approved and established master plan. Any pool submitted as a master plan pool where the design deviates from the approved master plan will be considered a custom pool.
6. The project site conditions where the proposed swimming pool is located shall be consistent with the specifications stated in the master plan. For example, horizontal set-back dimensions, distance to daylight, distance from adjacent structures and soils characteristics/properties shall comply with the specifications noted on the approved master plans.

7. Master plan pools shall be installed in native soils. If, during construction, the soil is determined to be expansive or fill material, a Geotechnical Investigation Report is required to be submitted as a construction change. Such report shall be prepared by a California registered Geotechnical Engineer. Refer to Section II in this bulletin for specific requirements.
8. The "Soils and Foundation" notes contained in Information Bulletin 191, Single-Family Dwellings/Duplexes/Companion Units –Structural shall be added on plans.

### **B. Custom Pools**

Any pool that does not meet the requirements and limitations of a master plan is considered a custom pool. Custom pools can be constructed of any depth, so long as they are designed to support the loading conditions prescribed by the governing CBC, and specific site conditions such as surcharge loads or sloped terrain. For custom pool submittals, construction plans, specifications and structural calculations shall be submitted. The Project Submittal Manual contains the list of documents which are required to be submitted for review and approval.

Depending on the proposed pool depth and design, a geotechnical investigation report may be required. Such report shall be prepared by a California registered Geotechnical Engineer or Soils Engineer. Refer to Section II of this bulletin for requirements.

All sheets of construction plans including the site plan and first page of structural calculations shall be stamped and signed by the California registered Civil or Structural engineer in responsible charge for structural design of the project.

## **II. SITE SPECIFIC SOILS CONDITION**

Some conditions on a specific site or design of a specific project may warrant a geotechnical investigation report to be prepared and submitted for review. Examples of such conditions are the presence of expansive soils, unstable ground, slope instability, fill material, liquefaction, and ground water tables. Examples of specific foundation designs are deep foundation system, pile foundation system, and mat foundations.

In addition, when the height of the pool wall, measured from the bottom of the pool to top of the adjacent grade being retained exceeds six (6) feet, such walls shall also be designed giving consideration to the dynamic seismic lateral earth pressure due to design earthquake ground motions (CBC, Section 1803.5.12). The value of the dynamic seismic lateral earth pressure shall be specified in the project geotechnical investigation report, and incorporated into structural design calculations.

When required, a geotechnical investigation report shall be prepared, stamped, and signed by a California registered Geotechnical Engineer and/or a Soils Engineer. The project Geotechnical investigation report shall be referenced on the project site plan and in the structural calculations by specifying the geotechnical firm which prepared the report, the report number, and date.

When the project geotechnical or soils engineer of record specifies special inspection of soils such as for observations, placement, compaction, depth and width verification, expansion analysis, etc, to be performed, project plans must also include a 'Statement of Special Inspections'. Refer to CBC, Ch 17, Section 1705 and Information Bulletin 191-Standard Notes for Building Permits for special inspection information and notes.

**III. SITE PLAN**

A site plan signed and stamped by the California registered Civil/Structural engineer or by California licensed architect of record is required for all pool designs. In addition to the requirements in Information Bulletin 122., the site plan must clearly indicate the following:

- A. Maximum exterior horizontal dimensions of the pools.
- B. Distance from the edge of the pools to all adjacent structures, embankments and property lines.
- C. Location of all pool service equipment, including distance to property lines from water edge.
- D. Location and depth of the deep and shallow ends of the pools.
- E. Location, extent, and height of all barriers. A reference to the barrier detail shall be made on plan.
- F. Direction of swing of access gates and labeling of any self-closing/self-latching gates.

**IV. ZONING REQUIREMENTS**

- A. Setback requirements for swimming pools (SDMC Section 145.3110) are as follows:
  1. If the pool projects three feet or less above grade, a three-foot minimum front, side and rear yard must be observed.
  2. If the pool projects more than three feet above grade, a four-foot minimum rear yard must be observed with front and side yards as specified in Article 1, Chapter 13 of the SDMC for the zone in which the pool is located, but in no case less than three feet.
- B. Yard requirements for accessory equipment (SDMC Section 145.3110, 2019 California Mechanical Code Section 802) are as follows:
  1. All heating, filtering, pumping and accessory equipment located entirely below grade and provided with a permanent, durable, protective covering need not observe front, side or rear yard requirements.
  2. All other heating, filtering, pumping and accessory equipment must observe a four-foot minimum side and rear yard requirement.
  3. Venting systems must observe a four-foot minimum front, side and rear yard requirement except when adjoining a public way.

**V. EXISTING PRIVATE SWIMMING POOLS, SPAS AND HOT TUBS**

Pursuant to Section 115928 (d) of the Health and Safety Code, Whenever a building permit is for the remodel or alteration of any existing swimming pool or spa, the permit shall require that the suction outlet of the existing swimming pool or spa be upgraded so as to be equipped with an anti-entrapment cover meeting current standards of the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) or the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME).

**VI. REMOVAL OF POOLS**

When pools are proposed to be removed from a site, a demolition permit is required to be obtained. If the existing pool is proposed to be drained and remain in place, the pool bottom and the walls shall be broken apart allowing sub-surface water to drain into the sub-grade soils. Then, the entire pool shall be filled with soils and compacted by a sheep foot or, as recommended by a California registered Geotechnical or Soils Engineer.

If the existing pool is to be removed in its entirety, the entire cavity shall be filled with soils and compacted or, as recommended by a California registered Geotechnical or Soils Engineer.

If a building or a structure is proposed to be built on the location of the existing pool after it is filled with competent fill material, the fill and compaction of the soils shall be documented, observed, and tested by the California registered Soils or Geotechnical Engineer of record as per recommendations specified in the geotechnical investigation report. All pool equipment shall be removed. All pool utilities at the equipment, such as electrical conduits, water line, and drain line shall be safely and securely capped.

#### **VII. HISTORIC REVIEW**

If there is a structure 45 years old or older on this site, the project is subject to Potential Historical Resource Review. Please refer to Information Bulletin 580, "Potential Historical Resource Review".

If the site is designated by the Historical Resources Board as individually significant, or it is located within the boundaries of adopted historical districts, or it is determined eligible for or listed in the California or National Registers; the project is subject to Designated Historical Resource Review. Please refer to Information Bulletin 581, "Designated Historical Resource Review."

#### **VIII. FEES**

For all applicable fees, refer to Information Bulletin 501, Fee Schedule For Construction Permits-Structures.

#### **Documents referenced in this Information Bulletin**

- San Diego Municipal Code (SDMC)
- California Building Code (CBC)
- [Information Bulletin 103](#) – Fee Schedule for Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing/Gas Permits
- [Information Bulletin 114a](#) – How to Establish Master Plans for Miscellaneous Structures
- [Information Bulletin 118](#) – How to Process Construction Changes to Permitted Plans
- [Information Bulletin 122](#) – How to prepare a Site Plan and Vicinity Map
- [Information Bulletin 191](#) – Standard Notes for Building Permits
- [Information Bulletin 501](#) – Fee Schedule Construction Permits – Structures
- [Information Bulletin 580](#) – Potential Historical Resource Review
- [Information Bulletin 581](#) – Designated Historical Resource Review