



Cargo Containers

CITY OF SAN DIEGO DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
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INFORMATION
BULLETIN

149

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The purpose of this information bulletin is to explain permitting requirements for using cargo containers as residential or non-residential buildings. Cargo containers are also known as metal cargo containers, steel cargo containers, shipping containers, freight containers, portable storage containers, cargo boxes, or sea vans.

A cargo container is an industrial, standardized, reusable portable vessel that was originally, specifically or formally designed for use in the packing, shipping or transportation of goods or commodities, and designed to be mounted on rail car, truck or ship.

Cargo containers shall comply with the applicable provisions of the governing edition of the California construction codes, the City of San Diego Land Development Code, regulations and ordinances as well as the requirements of this information bulletin.

I. PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

A. A building permit must be obtained to install cargo containers on a site.

Exceptions: Installation of cargo containers is exempt from building permit requirements when:

1. Used temporarily on a site for and during construction of a building having a valid building permit for contractor's office, hauling away debris, and for storage of construction equipment/tools/materials.
2. Used for storage of equipment/tools/props during a permitted special event.

A separate electrical and/or a mechanical/plumbing permit are required when a cargo container is supplied with electric power, gas, water, or sewer utilities whether installed on a temporary or permanent basis.

B. Discretionary Permits

The proposed use of a cargo container may require a discretionary permit prior to the issuance of a building permit if located in the Coastal Overlay Zone, a Planned District, or on a site with Environmentally Sensitive Lands.

II. ACCESSIBILITY

Cargo containers shall comply with the accessibility provisions of current and governing CBC, Chapter 11A or Chapter 11B, as applicable.

Exception: a cargo container used as a "Single Occupant Structure" such as a guard/watchman/attendant kiosk is exempt from accessibility regulations. (2013 CBC, Section 11B-203.6)

Documents Referenced in this Information Bulletin

- 2013 California Building Code, (CBC)
- 2013 California Residential Code, (CRC)
- San Diego Municipal Code, (SDMC)
- [Project Submittal Manual, Section 2.](#)
- [Information Bulletin 103, Mechanical, Plumbing/Gas, Electrical Fee Schedule and Worksheet](#)
- [Information Bulletin 122, How to Prepare a Site Plan and Vicinity Map](#)
- [Information Bulletin 501, Fee Schedule for Construction Permits - Structures](#)
- [Information Bulletin 580, Potential Historical Resource Review](#)
- [Water Meter Data Card, DS-16](#)
- [Hazardous Materials Reporting, DS-165](#)
- [Storm Water Requirements Applicability Checklist, DS-560](#)
- [General Application, DS-3032](#)
- [San Diego Regional Hazardous Materials Questionnaire, HM-9171](#)

III. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

A. Location on property

1. Exterior walls of containers shall meet the fire separation distance, fire resistance and opening protection or opening prohibition of the CBC or CRC as applicable.
2. When attached to adjacent buildings, containers shall meet the type of construction of adjacent building attached thereto. In addition, they shall meet the allowable building area and separation of occupancies as required per CBC or CRC as applicable.

B. Structural calculations

Shall be provided for the following conditions to justify for adequacy of structural capacity of cargo containers.

1. Cargo containers are altered such as by removal of any part of the exterior walls or roof plane, addition of doors, windows or skylights.
2. Multiple cargo containers are connected together by welding or bolted connections.
3. Cargo containers are double-stacked.

C. Stacking

Stacking of cargo containers shall be limited to a maximum of two-single cargo contain-

ers (double-stacked) of the same width and length. Such cargo containers shall be supported on a foundation system. Lower cargo containers shall be connected to the upper cargo containers at each corner. Refer to Section III in this information bulletin for structural requirements.

D. Testing

1. **Material.** The design strengths and permissible stresses for the material of the container shall be established by tests as provided for in Section 1707 of the California Building Code when such material properties cannot be identified by the manufacturer's designation as to manufacture and mill test.
2. **Alteration.** When construction of cargo containers are altered or modified, in situ load test may be required in accordance with Section 1709 of the California Building Code.

IV. FOUNDATION REQUIREMENTS

Single cargo containers may be placed on even grade (not sloping more than ¼ inch per foot) without a supporting foundation system, provided:

- A. Grade is level with suitable material for supporting such containers and,
- B. Cargo container is not supplied with water, gas, and sewer utilities.

A permanent foundation system is required to support multi-level cargo containers. A foundation plan showing a foundation system and details supporting cargo containers shall be provided bearing the signature, date, and the approval stamp of a California registered civil or structural engineer, or a California licensed architect.

V. HISTORICAL 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."

VI. FORMS TO COMPLETE

All cargo container project plans must be submitted with the following forms:

- A. **A General Application** (Form DS-3032)
- B. **Water Meter Data Card** (if the container contains any plumbing fixtures - Form DS-16)
- C. **Hazardous Materials Reporting** (Form DS-165)
- D. **SAN DIEGO Regional Hazardous Materials Questionnaire** (Form HM-9171)
- E. **Storm Water Requirements Applicability Check List** (Form DS-560)
- F. **Owner-Builder Verification** (if owner is applying for the permit - Form DS-3042)

VII. DRAWING, CALCULATIONS, AND REPORTS TO INCLUDE

- A. A cargo container installation project must include the following drawings and calculations:
 1. **Site Plan and Vicinity Map.** For more information, refer to Information Bulletin 122.
 2. **Foundation Plan and details.**
 3. **Floor plan showing all plumbing fixtures.**
 4. **Elevations with dimensions** are recommended when Planning and Zoning regulations require transparency, building articulation or other architectural design features.
 5. **Landscape Plan.** For more information, refer to [Landscape Plan Review](#).
 6. **Historic Resource Review.** If the project site contains a structure that is 45 or more years old AND is not a designated Historic Site/Structure or within a Historical District, refer to Information Bulletin 580 "Potential Historical Resource Review" for additional submittal requirements.
 7. **Structural calculations.** Refer to Section III in this information bulletin for detailed requirements.
 8. **Geotechnical Investigation Report** as required per San Diego Municipal Code, Chapter 14, Article 5, Division 18.
 9. **Testing report.** Refer to Section III in this information bulletin for detailed requirements.
 10. **Title24-Energy calculations** (if used as habitable space)
- B. Provide, in a table format, the following information on the first sheet of the plans:
 1. **Scope of Work.** The Title Sheet of Plans shall have a brief statement describing the scope of work of the project. For example; Scope of work includes installation of one detached metal cargo container for use as storage shed.
 2. **Sheet Index.** List of all the sheets includ-

- ed in the plan package.
3. **Project Team.** List name, address, and phone number of all design professionals including engineers, architects, and designers involved with the project.
 4. **Legal description and Assessor Parcel Number(s)** for the property on which the development is proposed.
 5. **Owner's name(s) and address(es).**
 6. **Proposed use.**
 7. **Zoning designation and/or overlay zone designations** (Coastal, Coastal Height Limit, Airport Influence Area, etc.).
 8. **Any approved development permits** (discretionary permits) for the project.
 9. **Type of Construction.** Cargo containers are classified as Type V-B construction.
 10. **Occupancy Classification(s)** per the California Building Code.
 11. **The Building Code year used for the design of the project.**
 12. **The number of stacks (single or double).**
 13. **The overall height** of the container from top of adjacent grade to the highest point of elevation.
 14. **The gross floor area and floor area ratio** (if applicable).
 15. **Condition of soil (undisturbed, compact fill, or loose fill)** when the proposed construction includes new Foundation system, with a reference to the project geotechnical investigation report.
 16. **Landscape area square footage for water conservation purposes.**
 17. **Total area of disturbance.** For more information refer to Section (2) of the Land Development Manual, Volume I, Chapter 1, Project Submittal Requirements.

VIII. FEES

A. Building Permit Fees

Refer to Information Bulletin 501, "Fee Schedule, Construction Permits - Structures" for all applicable fees.

B. Mechanical/Plumbing/Gas, Electrical Fees

Refer to Information Bulletin 103, "Fee Schedule and Worksheet for Mechanical, Plumbing/Gas, Electrical," for charges.

C. Water and Sewer Fees

Water and sewer capacity fees are due when the container contains plumbing fixtures and/or the property will be irrigated. For more information, refer to Information Bulletin 501, "Fee Schedule, Construction Permits - Structures" for all Water and Sewer applicable fees.

For detailed information on the submittal requirements refer to the Project Submittal Manual.