



FLORIDA DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Office of Floodplain Management Guidance

FLOOD-DAMAGED EXTERIOR EQUIPMENT AND APPLIANCES

PURPOSE:

Respond to questions regarding the provisions added to the 8th Edition of the Florida Building Code that require exterior equipment and appliances that are replaced after sustaining flood damage to be fully elevated in compliance with the code (see excerpts on next page). There are situations where full compliance is difficult to achieve while maintaining safe functioning of the equipment, yet some elevation is feasible. Partial elevation meets the intent to reduce flood damage without increasing other risks, such as exposure to wind loads and penetration of the roof deck if full elevation would require elevation to the roof.

The requirement does not apply to:

- Exterior equipment and appliances that can be cleaned, repaired, and safely placed back in service.
- Equipment located in crawlspaces, basements, enclosed areas below elevated buildings, and attached garages.
- When buildings are determined to have sustained substantial damage or when buildings will be substantially improved. In both of those cases, the building and the equipment must be brought into full compliance with the flood requirements of the FBC.

BACKGROUND:

The FBC provisions that require elevation of flood-damaged exterior equipment and appliances were approved to recognize that many buildings in floodplains were built before communities started regulating and requiring buildings to be elevated and constructed to minimize exposure to flooding. During floods, exterior equipment and appliances that serve those older buildings get damaged, even when the buildings do not sustain significant damage. In some areas, low-level flooding has occurred repeatedly. When buildings are flooded and elevated exterior equipment remains functional, recovery costs are reduced and recovery time shortened. Methods used to raise replacement exterior equipment are the same as the methods used when equipment is installed to serve new construction and substantially improved buildings.

PROPOSED CODE CHANGE FOR 9TH EDITION FLORIDA BUILDING CODE:

FDEM submitted a code change proposal for the 9th Edition FBC (2027) to modify the requirement to allow partial elevation of flood-damaged exterior equipment and appliances. The proposal is similar to proposals submitted to modify the International Codes to require replaced exterior equipment and appliances to be:

1. Elevated to or above the same height above grade as the first floor of the building or 4 feet above grade, whichever is higher.
2. In an enclosure that is dry floodproofed to the same heights, where the equipment serves nonresidential buildings or nonresidential portions of mixed-use buildings.

IMPLEMENTATION:

In the interim, while the 9th Edition proposed changes that would allow partial elevation of flood-damaged exterior equipment and appliances are pending final approval by the Florida Building Commission, FDEM recommends that local Building Officials and Floodplain Administrators consider the effect of the anticipated code change in their decisions regarding replacement of flood-damaged exterior equipment and appliances.

DISCLAIMER:

This guidance is informational and should not be construed as legal advice. The FDEM Office of Floodplain Management (FDEM) Office of Floodplain Management (OFM) staff are floodplain management specialists, not licensed building officials, and thus are not authorized by statute to interpret the Florida Building Code.

CHAPTER 7 ALTERATIONS – LEVEL 1

701.3 Flood hazard areas. In flood hazard areas:

1. Alterations that constitute *substantial improvement* shall require that the building comply with Section 1612 of the *Florida Building Code, Building*, or Section R322 of the *Florida Building Code, Residential*, as applicable.
2. Replacement of exterior equipment and exterior appliances damaged by flood shall meet the requirements of Section 1612 of the *Florida Building Code, Building*, or Section R322.1.6 of the *Florida Building Code, Residential*, as applicable.

8TH EDITION, FLORIDA BUILDING CODE, RESIDENTIAL¹

SECTION R322 FLOOD-RESISTANT CONSTRUCTION

R322.1.6 Protection of mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems. Electrical systems, equipment and components; heating, ventilating, air conditioning; plumbing appliances and plumbing fixtures; duct systems; and other service equipment shall be located at or above the elevation required in Section R322.2 or R322.3. Replacement of exterior equipment and exterior appliances damaged by flood shall meet the requirements of this section. If replaced as part of a substantial improvement, electrical systems, equipment and components; heating, ventilating, air conditioning and plumbing appliances and plumbing fixtures; duct systems; and other service equipment shall meet the requirements of this section. Systems, fixtures, and equipment and components shall not be mounted on or penetrate through walls intended to break away under flood loads.

Exception: Locating electrical systems, equipment and components; heating, ventilating, air conditioning; plumbing appliances and plumbing fixtures; duct systems; and other service equipment is permitted below the elevation required in Section R322.2 or R322.3 provided that they are designed and installed to prevent water from entering or accumulating within the components and to resist hydrostatic and hydrodynamic loads and stresses, including the effects of buoyancy, during the occurrence of flooding to the required elevation in accordance with ASCE 24. Equipment for pools, spas and water features shall be permitted below the elevation required in Section R322.2 or R322.3 provided it is elevated to the extent practical and is anchored to prevent floatation and resist flood forces and is supplied by branch circuits that have ground-fault circuit interrupter protection. Electrical wiring systems are permitted to be located below the required elevation provided that they conform to the provisions of the electrical part of this code for wet locations.

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<https://www.floridadisaster.org/dem/mitigation/floodplain/community-resources/> (under Guidance, Ordinance Amendments, FBC Amendments, and Sample Forms).

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² Comparable requirements are in FBC Mechanical Sec. 301.16 and FBC Mechanical Sec. 401.5.