



RETAINING WALL HANDOUT

Building Department

1480 Main Street

St. Helena, CA 94574

(707) 968-2657

The purpose of this policy is to clarify when a building permit is required for the installation of a retaining wall.

DEFINITIONS:

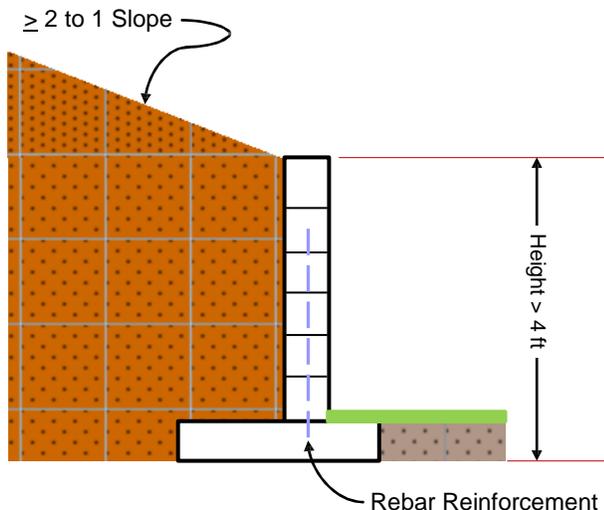
Retaining Wall: A wall designed to resist earth and/or fluid pressure, including any surcharge in accordance with acceptable engineering practices.

Surcharge: The vertical load imposed on retained soil that may impose a lateral force in addition to lateral earth pressure of retained soil. For example: Sloping retained soil; structure footings supported by the retained soil; adjacent vehicle loads supported by retained soil.

Retaining Wall Height: The vertical distance measured from the bottom of the footing to the finish grade at the top of the wall (i.e. upper grade). This is the height reflected in CBC Sec. 105.2 item 5;3 and it includes the wall and depth of the footing below grade.

Exposed Wall Height: The vertical distance measured from the finish grade at the bottom of the wall (i.e. lower soil grade) to the foundation grade at the top of the wall (i.e. upper soil grade). The height does not include the wall depth of footing below grade.

WHEN IS A PERMIT REQUIRED?



- Total wall height is greater than 4 feet measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the retaining wall.
- Back slope adjacent to the retaining wall is equal to or greater than 2' horizontal to 1' foot vertical (2:1 slope)
- Surcharge load conditions exist as defined (Buildings, roads, vehicle loads or sloped conditions).
- Solid fences are attached (or directly adjacent) to the proposed retaining wall.



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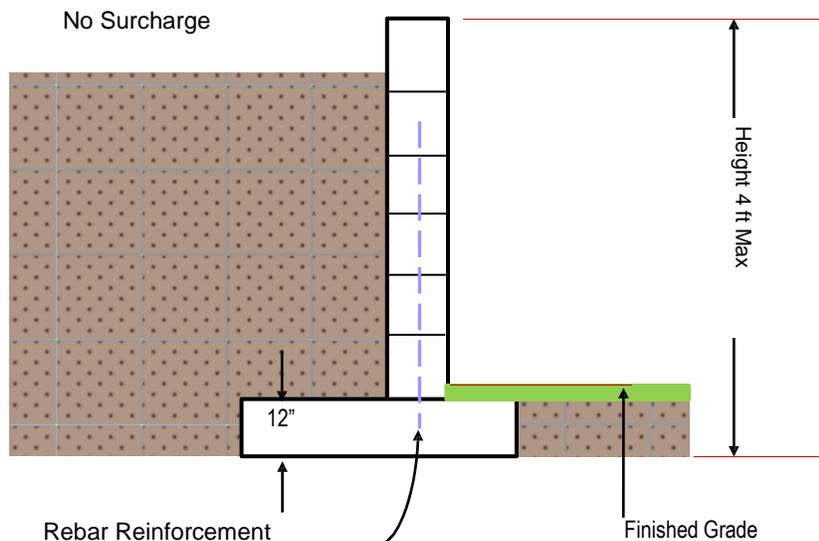
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WHEN IS A PERMIT NOT REQUIRED?



A construction permit is NOT required for retaining walls which:

- Are constructed of reinforced concrete or reinforced masonry and do not retain more than 36" of earth (exposed wall height).
- Are constructed of precast block wall systems that are installed as per manufacturer's listing and instructions which do not retain more than 36" of earth (exposed wall height).
- Are constructed of decay resistant material or treated wood and do not retain more than 24" of earth.
- Do not impound Class I, II or III liquids.
- Do not support surcharge loads as defined (building roads and terraced or tiered slopes).