



2015 SBC Code Interpretation

Section SEBC 304.1, SBC 706
Fire Walls in Lieu of Substantial Alterations
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The following interpretation, policy or code alternate is intended to provide guidance to staff for consistency of review and is subject to change without notice. Application of this interpretation, policy or code alternate to specific projects may vary.

Code Issue: Can a fire wall be used to separate a building into separate buildings to limit the scope of substantial alteration work?

Example: The applicant proposes extensive work which would trigger a substantial alteration to the building per SEBC 304.1. The substantial alteration provisions apply to the entire building. If very minimal work is intended in a portion of the building, the applicant may propose constructing a fire wall to divide the building into two separate buildings, so that the provisions apply only to the portion of the building where the extensive work is proposed. The substantial alteration provisions are evaluated independently for each building.

Code Interpretation: In general, a fire wall is not allowed to create separate buildings in order to avoid the substantial alteration requirements to a portion of a building. However, individual cases may be approved by CRIQ for buildings that are not only separated with a fire wall, but also act independently and have independent means of egress.

The two buildings created by the fire wall require:

- Structural independence (including seismic separation), and
- Independent means of egress. The occupants of the substantially altered portion may not egress through the portion that is not upgraded.

For questions about whether this code solution applies to your project:

- *If you have submitted a permit application, contact the Building Code plan reviewer assigned to your application*
- *If you have not submitted an application, send us a question through the SDCI website <http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/toolsresources/sendusaquestion/default.htm> or in person at the Applicant Services Center. Visit the Applicant Services Center website for more information about hours and location <http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/aboutus/howeare/applicantservicescenter/default.ht>*