



vantage
point

Newest in the Ongoing Series

We go through this every few years: the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Elevation Certificate expires and a new one is not ready until several months post-expiration. Part of this is related to the need for each and every form issued by any federal agency to be reviewed and approved for release by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). In line with its stated mission "to serve the President of the United States in implementing his vision across the Executive Branch" (a direct quote from the OMB website), OMB oversees agency performance and "information/IT (including paperwork reduction, privacy, and security)." This is why we see two sections on the first page of the form entitled "Paperwork Reduction Act Notice" and

"Privacy Act Statement" as well as an OMB Control Number. This is also a reason for further delays in release of updated forms, simply a fact of governmental life.

So—back to more essential aspects of the newest Elevation Certificate, released January 6, 2016. The biggest technical change is in the building diagrams. Old Diagram 2, for structures with a basement, has been split into 2A and 2B. As a quick reminder, a basement has a floor that is below grade on all sides no matter what the use of that subgrade area may be. The distinction between a basement and a crawlspace that is subgrade on all sides is defined by the height and depth of the enclosed area: FEMA's Technical Bulletin 11 tells us that a crawlspace is limited in height to four feet and in depth below grade to two feet. If either (or both) of those measurements is exceeded, we have a basement and

not a crawlspace. The Elevation Certificate changes where the measurement is taken, saying the enclosure's floor must be within five feet of the top of the next higher floor (rather than four feet from the bottom of that next floor), but the intent is the same.

New Diagram 2A is the same as the old Diagram 2 with which we have been familiar for years; 2B is the new addition. While the main description at the top of the box with each diagram is the same, the "distinguishing features" and the drawings are distinct. 2B specifically addresses structures for which the base of the access to the basement is subgrade, requiring stairs down to the doorway.

The only other technical change is in the instructions for Item A5, regarding the longitude and latitude coordinates for the center of the front of the building. If decimal degrees are used, coordinates are now to be provided "to at least 5 decimal places or

DIAGRAM 2A

All single- and multiple-floor buildings with basement (other than split-level) and high-rise buildings with basement, either detached or row type (e.g., townhouses); with or without attached garage.

Distinguishing Feature - The bottom floor (basement or underground garage) is below ground level (grade) on all sides.*

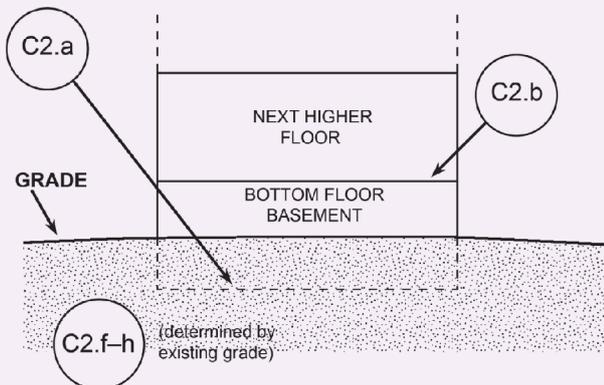
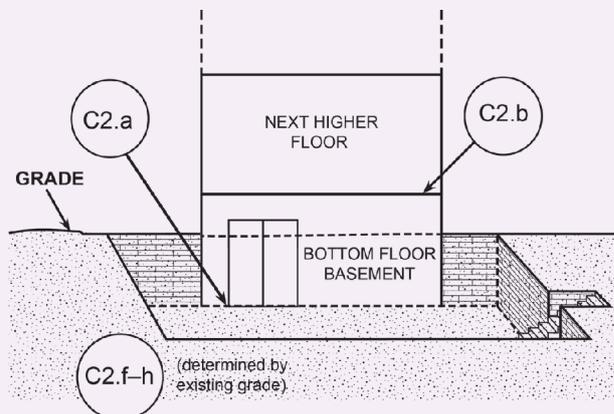


DIAGRAM 2B

All single- and multiple-floor buildings with basement (other than split-level) and high-rise buildings with basement, either detached or row type (e.g., townhouses); with or without attached garage).

Distinguishing feature - The bottom floor (basement or underground garage) is below ground level (grade) on all sides; most of the height of the walls are below ground level on all sides and the door and area of egress is also below ground level on all sides.*



better” as opposed to 4 decimals or better in prior versions. However, coordinates are still to be “accurate within 66 feet.”

Now, format of the form—that is a different matter. Section D with our signature, seal, and comments has returned to the back of the form, where it was many years ago. Earlier protests about separating the information being certified from the actual signature had moved the signature and seal to the front of the form for awhile, but new requirements to use the DHS template in designing FEMA forms now impose specific size type and other details that prevent certification and certified elevations from appearing together. Such a shift also means that Section G, for Community Officials, has been moved to a third page of the form, all by itself.

There are two updated URLs in the instructions. Item B1 gives a new link for the Community Status Book. This document identifies every participating and/or mapped community’s unique six-digit number, the date of the most current index map, and other important information about a community’s participation or non-participation in the National Flood Insurance Program. Item B12 instructions provide an updated link for information about the Coastal Barrier Resource System in the Keywords section of FEMA’s website.

Some typographical errors have entered the mix in retyping the contents of the form—which is now formatted for legal sized paper rather than letter stock. While references to the pages of the Elevation Certificate on which the building diagrams appear are outdated for Items A7 and A8, these are not critical. Other typos are simply from poor proofing. But there are words missing from the description of “distinguishing features” for Diagram 8 that make it incomprehensible. Go back to the old version to figure out what it means.

As always, there is a phase-in period during which the old expired form can still be used. During those six months, both new and old forms are accepted, and it may be possible that some corrections to the new form will be issued (without changing the transition date of when only the new version will be accepted). ■

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