



INFORMATION SHEET

NO. IE-01

DATE : July 5, 2023
CATEGORY : Interior Environment
SUBJECT : **Natural Light**

PURPOSE : The purpose of this information sheet is to clarify available methods for providing natural light.

REFERENCES : San Francisco Building Code, Current Edition
California Building Code, Current Edition
San Francisco Building Code, Section 1204
California Building Code, Sections 1204 and 1208

INTERPRETATIONS:

The San Francisco Building Code (SFBC) Section 1204.1 has limited the use of artificial light by adding an exception to the California Building Code (CBC) that states Habitable rooms (excluding kitchens, home offices and media rooms) within a dwelling unit or congregate residence shall be provided with natural light **by means of exterior glazed openings** in accordance with Section 1204.2."

CBC Section 1204.2 allows two methods of providing this natural light:

(1) By obtaining it from exterior glazed openings of **Adjoining Spaces** (1204.2.1) that are open enough to each other to allow the adjoining spaces to share additional natural light supplied only to one of the spaces.

(2) By obtaining it directly from **Exterior Openings** (1204.2.2), opening directly onto a public way, yard or court, or by skylights.

Along with other sizing requirements, adjoining spaces used for required natural light must have one-half of the area of the common wall "open and unobstructed." "Open and unobstructed" pertains to light only and would allow fixed or operable, glazed or translucent, openings or panels as meeting the intent of the code in this regard.


DISCUSSION:


San Francisco's small building footprints often limit available exterior surface area for windows. Without the ability to provide required light from exterior openings of adjacent rooms, rooms not immediately adjacent to an exterior wall would become non-habitable rooms.

Buildings would have to be designed with large light courts through the interior of the building, potentially reducing the number of units and the viability of such projects.

The requirement for openings between adjoining spaces sharing light from an exterior opening is to be "open and unobstructed" and is not clearly defined in the code.

Several cases brought before the Board of Examiners were determined to meet the intent of the code with openings of adjacent rooms that were in-filled with translucent products and were considered open and unobstructed for the purposes of light.


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