

CODE VIOLATIONS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Code is a larger, complicated set of local, state and national property standards. This Question and Answer is offered by the Penn Hills CDC Housing Committee as a means to educate residents about the basic code standards that are most likely to be observed in our neighborhoods. Our primary purpose is to facilitate residents' understanding of code issues and procedures related to common violations so appropriate action may be taken by code officials.

1. What are code violations?

The Municipality of Penn Hills has set up certain laws and regulations, referred to as codes, to help ensure the safety of its residents. When someone does not adhere to these, it is considered a violation.

Traditional municipal powers include setting and enforcing minimum community standards for the health, safety and welfare of its residents. These standards are set out in Pennsylvania's statewide building code (the Uniform Construction Code, or UCC) and Penn Hills Code of Ordinances which is handled by the Penn Hills Code Enforcement Department.

What are some of the violations that are priorities for Code Enforcement?

- (a) Unsafe and vacant structures.
- (b) Junk cars located on private property but not on the street.
- (c) Construction or building without a permit.
- (d) Failure to obtain occupancy permits.
- (e) Unfenced or unsafe swimming pools.
- (f) Rubbish and debris, garbage, dumping, etc.
- (g) High grass over 10".
- (h) Lack of shrubbery and vegetation maintenance.
- (i) Accessory structure maintenance.
- (j) Missing address numbers.
- (k) Shrubby causing traffic visibility issues.
- (l) Boats and commercial vehicles not properly parked.

What types of problems are handled by the police rather than by Code Enforcement?

Gunfire, vicious or dangerous animals, and abandoned vehicles left on the street should be reported to the police by calling 911 or by visiting the police station at the Municipal Building located at 12245 Frankstown Road, Penn Hills, PA. 15235-3494: Phone: 911 or FAX: 412-798-2091.

2. Where can I report a concern or violation?

You can call the Penn Hills Municipal Building at 412-798-2132 to speak to a code enforcement officer.

3. What kind of information will they need from me?

Ask yourself, *“If I had to check into this complaint, what would I need to know?”* It is very important to identify what the problem is and exactly where the problem is located. If it is concerning a house or yard, the house number and the street are necessary. If there is no house number, tell them what house is next door or across the street. If no house is nearby, tell them where it is located from a specific address or landmark.

If it is regarding a deserted building, an abandoned automobile or an empty field, provide as much information as you can about the location. It is not necessary but it is helpful if you provide your name and telephone number so that they can contact you if they have questions about your complaint.

If the situation could be dangerous to others and to the code enforcement officer, please explain this to them when you contact them. Report things such as *“The owner of the house has a dog that bites.”*, *“The raccoon was acting strangely and children live there.”*, or *“I have seen people with guns possibly dealing drugs near this car”*.

4. What will happen after I make a complaint?

Code Enforcement will prioritize the complaints that it receives based on the seriousness of the situation being reported. A code enforcement officer will check into the complaint and take the necessary actions to resolve the complaint. Code Enforcement must also follow specific legal procedures. The length of time this takes will vary. They are not able to contact you to give updates.

5. I am afraid to report these people? Will they be given my name as having reported them?

Code Enforcement is not supposed to give out the name of the person making the complaint.

6. My neighbor and I have been arguing for years, should I report my neighbor because I am angry?

Code enforcement officers are very busy, their jobs are very serious and they do have limited resources. Please only report valid concerns.

Other possible solutions are available when there are disagreements or disputes. The Penn Hills CDC can provide you with neighborhood mediation referral information. Contact one of our representatives for this information.

7. The house next to me has been empty for a long time and is deteriorating. Can Code Enforcement do anything about this?

Yes, be sure to report this to Code Enforcement. While there are many legal ways this might be handled by them, there are additional ways that the Penn Hills CDC may respond to the problem property. Please also contact a Penn Hills CDC representative for possible solutions.

8. The grass, weeds and bushes are not being cut at a house or location near me, is that a violation?

Grass and weeds should be kept at ten (10) inches or below. Trees and shrubs should be kept trimmed to prevent visibility problems, especially where cars must pass. The general rule is no branches below 10 feet from the street.

Empty lots must be cut to the rules and regulations of Penn Hills except when it is not possible to locate and notify the owner or the owner is deceased. The municipality does not have the budgetary resources to maintain empty lots.

9. The person up the street has had a car sitting in his driveway and it has no current inspection sticker, the license plate has been expired for some time and the car never moves. Should I report this?

Yes, if abandoned for more than seventy-two hours and as long as the abandoned vehicle is on the person's property and not parked on the street, it should be reported to Code Enforcement. If located on the street and not the person's property, report this to the police. If a vehicle has an out of state plate, Code Enforcement may not be able to have that vehicle removed from a property.

10. How can I tell if a vehicle is really abandoned?

Generally the vehicle is considered abandoned if it has not been in running condition for some time; it is obviously not going to pass inspection and it is not located in a junk yard. One or more flat or missing tires can indicate abandonment if not being replaced.

11. Can a vehicle be parked on the roadway when being repaired?

No one can legally put a vehicle on the roadway so that they can repair it, except in an emergency. They cannot put it on the roadway to wash it, grease it or make non-emergency repairs. Vehicles that are parked in the way traffic, being repaired or not, should be reported to the police.

12. People put trash out that is not picked up for days, weeks or longer. What can be done?

Trash should be put out for collection only the night before collection. Bulk waste such as furniture and tires must be stored in a fashion that it does not collect waste and water. Recyclable materials must be placed in the red recycling cans. Leaves should be placed in approved recycling bags designated for that purpose and placed for collection according to the schedule for collection of leaves.

13. I know of places where hazardous waste and garbage are being dumped along a hill? Is this a violation?

Yes, report any obvious dumping to Code Enforcement, especially if hazardous waste is seen. If you witness this after 4:30 PM, when the Code Enforcement office is closed, report it immediately to the police.

14. People are throwing snow in the road where cars travel. Should report it?

Yes, it is prohibited to throw snow ice or snow into roadway after the municipality tries to clear the area of snow and/ or ice. Report this to the police.

15. The next door neighbor's dog barks for hours, how long does it have to bark before I can report this?

The barking must happen frequently and continue for more than 30 minutes at any one time. This should be reported to the police and/or Hoffman Animal Control. Hoffman Animal Control can be reached by calling (724) 468-5505.

16. A neighbor leaves their dog out in the rain with no shelter, food or water. Who do I report this to?

If it is a dangerous situation for the animal, call the police. In non-emergency situations this can also be reported directly to Hoffman Animal Control by calling (724) 468-5505 or the Humane Society at 412-321-4625 and ask for a Humane officer..

17. Where do I report that my neighbor lets his dog roam all over and it comes into my yard and relieves itself which I have to clean up?

Animals are not allowed to roam at large and this situation should be reported to the police or Hoffman Animal Control.

18. I see signs advertising companies buying houses and other types of signs posted on trees and telephone poles? Is this permitted?

Any signs like these are not permitted and should be reported to Code Enforcement.

19. What are some of the common problems that Code Enforcement cannot address?

Currently there are no existing laws in the Penn Hills ordinances to address property line disputes; trees falling from one property into the next; leaves and grass being blown into the street ; leaves from one person's property blowing into their neighbor's property; and whether the less attractive side of someone's fence faces their neighbor.

20. What are some of the permits that are required in Penn Hills?

Penn Hills Code Enforcement has provided the following list of permits that must be applied for and issued by them before any work may begin. All permit applicants must now have their own photo identification at the time that they apply. It is best to contact Code Enforcement directly to determine if the following have been updated or revised:

Required Residential Permits

By state law and local laws, residents will need permits, inspections and a certificate of occupancy for the following:

1. Any new house that is a one or two family dwelling.
2. Any addition to an existing house by constructing one or more new stories on top of the existing house or by increasing the perimeter of the existing house.
3. Installing a new manufactured home (HUD code).

4. Installing a new modular home.
5. Relocating and installing a used manufactured home.
6. Any garage or carport that is attached to the house.
7. Any garage, carport, shed or greenhouse that is not attached to a single family dwelling and is over 1,000 square feet or cost factor is \$2,000 or more fair market value (measuring the perimeter for sq. footage)
8. Any garage, carport, shed or greenhouse that is not attached to a two-family dwelling or a townhouse and is 120 square feet or larger (measuring the perimeter).
9. Enclosing a porch or patio.
10. Installing /building a sunroom or “three seasons” room.
11. Installing any deck that is more than 30” above ground level at any point around the perimeter of the deck.
12. Installing any deck less than 30” above ground level if it has a roof/covering above it.
13. Installing an indoor or outdoor hot tub or spa.
14. Constructing an in-ground swimming pool (inside or outside).
15. Installing any swimming pool (including the inflatable type) that has a water depth of 24” or more.
16. Installing any fence higher than 6 feet.
17. Installing any retaining wall higher than 4 feet.
18. Structural alterations to existing dwelling unit. (The Building Code Official will determine if the work you intend to perform involves structural alterations.)
19. Changes to an existing means of egress (exit door, stairs, handrails, guard systems, ramps).
20. Any portion of a dwelling or residential accessory structure that will be used for commercial purposes (open to employees or the public). Examples include: professional offices; business office; notaries; beauty shops; nail salons; barber shops; and car or equipment repair.

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