



Factory Assembled Structures Program

Using Shipping Containers for Buildings

Shipping containers may be converted into FAS regulated structures using the alternate methods of construction provisions in the appropriate codes.

For containers that are not mounted on a chassis:

Persons converting containers into a building at a building site must obtain permits and approvals from the local building department and either, the LNI electrical program or city electrical program, as applicable. LNI Factory Assembled Structures (FAS) does not regulate on-site construction.

Containers can be part of a “factory-built housing or commercial structure” (modular building). When containers are converted into a building or a part of a building, at an off-site location then FAS approval is required.

The plan review, inspection and approval process is the same as for regular modular construction being approved under WAC 296-150F. Once the containerized buildings are approved at the factory, LNI does not retain oversight and the building departments and the LNI electrical program handle all further issues, including installation and site permitting.

Construction plans for containerized buildings must be approved and the factory portions of the work must be inspected at the fabrication site as it progresses. Structural modifications to the containers must be fully detailed on the design plans and supported by engineering analysis. All regular building inspections are still required and structural steel welding must be inspected in accordance with the special inspection requirements in the building code.

The resulting “containerized structure” must meet all requirements of the state building code. This includes the provisions of the state energy code and requirements for minimum room sizes, ceiling heights, working spaces and clearances. The containerized building must have legal exits. The rear cargo doors may be used only if they are altered to meet all building code requirements including those for door hardware. Cargo-door style hardware that can be padlocked shut is not acceptable on any exit door.

If “used” containers are being converted, the engineer/architect must provide a structural observation letter to FAS indicating they inspected the used containers and the containers are appropriate for the intended use. The engineer/architect must determine that the containers are not damaged beyond repair or otherwise unusable (for example they are contaminated). The letter must reference the container ID numbers and the plans must show any repairs that must be made.

For containers mounted on a chassis:

Containers that are converted for use like a building and are mounted on a permanent chassis so they are transportable over the highway (for example a mobile office), must meet the agencies rules for Commercial Coach Trailers – WAC 296-150C and be inspected by FAS at the factory, during fabrication. The local building department permits and inspects the use, location and installation of Commercial Coaches within their jurisdiction; FAS is not involved in this process. Some jurisdictions do not permit Commercial Coaches within their jurisdiction; because these mobile buildings do not meet the requirements of the state building code (see following paragraph). LNI retains oversight of any futures changes or alterations, which must be inspected and approved by FAS.

As an alternative, a trailer-mounted container can be approved as a modular building following the guidelines at the beginning of this document. These trailered buildings must be designed to meet all state building code requirements and the chassis must be engineered to handle all building code and transportation forces. These units are inspected by FAS during fabrication at the factory. Once they are approved at the factory, LNI does not retain oversight and the building departments and the LNI electrical program handle all further issues.