

Special Report : Camping on Private Properties

Section 1: Camping Types & Standards regulated by the SLO County Planning Department.

Section 1 outlines the general types of camping and standards for operating a seasonal or incidental camping with a land use permit. Camping activities must be authorized / permitted by use permit(s).

Type: Organization Camping

- Commercial, i.e. campgrounds hosted by churches, RV parks/ mobilehome parks.
- Allowed in Rural Land, Recreation, Public Facility land use categories
- Subject to County RV Parks land use standards (commercial camping standards)
- Require highest level of use permit (Development Plan) in conjunction with State Department permits, as applicable.
- Discretionary use permit subject to multi agency review, community input and public hearing approval.
- Discretionary review areas include and not limited to: setbacks, utilities, services, circulation/ access, common area facilities, fencing/ screening/ security for the commercial camp ground.
- Allowed density max 12 units/ acre.

Type: Incidental Camping (focus of NCAC report)

- Smaller scale, temporary/ seasonal in nature (tent camp, RV, Van Camper), secondary to the primary use of the land.
- Allowed in Rural Land, Recreation, Public Facility & Agriculture land use categories. Rural lands and agricultural parcels are larger parcels with agriculture as the primary use. Therefore, rural camping is allowed as incidental to the agricultural operations as long as camping activities meet these required findings:
 - Camping does not compromise the ag use/production of the site
 - Camping does not impact surrounding ag operations / uses
- Requires lower level use permit (Minor Use Permit)
- Discretionary use permit subject to multi agency review, community input and public hearing approval.
- **Min. parcel site requirements to support camping.** To determine the min. parcel site camping can be supported, it depends on the property's land use category and general 4-prong test: remoteness (distance from town), access road, slope, fire hazard / emergency response time. The results of these tests will determine the min. parcel size where incidental camping can be supported.
 - o As a quick snapshot (no specific details): the min. parcel size for the following land use categories are:
 - Rural Land = 20 acres (optimum results from all test)
 - Recreation / Public Facilities = 6,000 sf to 20 acres
 - Agriculture (varies) = 20 acres (active ag operations/ irrigated crop)
40 acres (dry farm/ orchard)
320 acres (grazing)

- Allowed density 1 unit/ acre with max 10 camping sites
- Required 1000' setback from public roads & property lines
- Required basic provisions : water supply & portable restrooms
- Can include max. 10 basic spaces for RV campers (without hookups)

Section 2: Most Frequently Asked Public Questions received by SLO County Planning Department.

Below are the top 3 public inquiries related to camping on private properties received by the Dept. The explanation offered are mostly general guidance without specific property details.

1. I own a vacant / undeveloped parcel. Can I park my RV / pitch a tent on it and use it over the weekends?

Short answer is no. However, you can enjoy using your property during the day but you will have to clear out by the end of the day. Generally on undeveloped parcels, you cannot store or live in RVs or tent camp overnight.

The exception is if your parcel is in Agriculture / Rural Land use category, incidental camping is allowed with 2 conditions: active agricultural operations must be established and the parcel meets the min. size required. Then you must apply for a use permit in order to camp on your parcel.

No camping is allowed on parcels in the Residential use categories. These are usually smaller lots within established neighborhoods.

2. I own a house and a RV. Can I use my RV as an extra room for my guests or myself ?

For a parcel with an established residential primary use, the County Land Use Ordinance on Accessory Storage, allows for home owners to park and/or store one RV on their property. This RV storage is considered an accessory storage to the residence. The onsite RV cannot be lived in or used as an extra sleeping bedroom or guesthouse. RVs are meant to be used in designated campgrounds i.e. RV parks, or areas authorized with land use permit for RV camping.

For larger parcels zoned Rural Land/ Residential Rural (parcels approx. 10-20 acres), property owners can store up to 10 RV on site, as long as they not visible from public roads. None of these can be lived in.

3. Can my kids have their friends over, pitch a tent and camp out in my backyard?

Believe it or not, this one is one for the harder ones to answer. While the County Land Use Ordinance does not have specific codes that prohibit personal tent camping within an existing residential backyard, we advise the public to be reasonable and practice safe guidelines. For example, are there responsible adults on site all the time? They should be mindful of neighbors and not create noise nuisance at night or conduct any unsafe fire activities which can become fire/ air quality hazards to the neighbors.

Section 3: General Enforcement Approach to Unpermitted Camping on Private Properties

Below is a general discussion of County enforcement approach when it comes to received complaints related to camping activities on private properties.

1. **Complaint-based enforcement.** The County does not have the capacity or actively survey all properties to ensure that no illegal camping activities are occurring at any time. The County Code Enforcement Department relies on complaints either called or emailed in with specific incidents/ site locations and based on that report, the code enforcement staff will start an investigation by driving by the reported site.
2. **Health & Safety Priority.** The Code Enforcement staff receives a high volume of complaint calls/ emails daily. In order to ensure the general health and safety of the community and environment, code enforcement staff will prioritize investigating complains related to suspected active, illegal construction/ building/ grading operations or camping activities that poses imminent health and safety threats.
3. **Investigative Process.** When a complaint is received, Code Enforcement staff will conduct a drive by to investigate to determine the level of violation. Sometimes the violation(s) is clear and allows for immediate action(s), sometimes the violation(s) are hard to see from the public road. Without proper authorization, immediate access to the violation site(s) can be limited and County staff has to work with the property owner(s) to evaluate the violation(s) reported.
4. **Other Agency Involvement.** If there is clear violation where camping activities have caused waste dumping or water concerns, Environmental Health will be contacted. If there is concerning fire activities, then CAL Fire/ Cambria Fire will be notified.
5. **Weekend Code Enforcement Service.** County residents can report suspected general code violations either via phone or online via <https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Planning-Building/Code-Enforcement/Report-Suspected-Code-Violation.aspx>. The County has on-call weekend and holiday enforcement service hours from 8am to 10pm. For the weekend and holiday enforcement, county residents can call (805) 788-2350 to report suspected violations such as unpermitted camping activities, or grading, work that is causing environmental damage, unpermitted temporary events and violations of event conditions.