

STATE BUILDING CODE INTERPRETATION NO. I-51-00

August 9, 2000

The following is offered in response to your letter to me dated July 28, 2000 in which you request a formal interpretation of Sections 210-70 (a) (3) and 210-70 (c) of the 1999 National Electrical Code portion of the 1999 State Building Code.

Question 1: What criteria is used to determine if lighting is required in the attic space of a one or two family dwelling constructed under the 1995 CABO One and Two Family Dwelling Code portion of the 1999 State Building Code?

Answer 1: The above referenced sections of the National Electrical Code (NEC) set forth the requirements that if an attic space contains storage or equipment that requires servicing, lighting is required in that attic space. It is clear then that any attic containing equipment requiring service must have lighting at or near such equipment. The NEC, however does not offer guidance as to how one determines if an attic space is suitable for storage. The 1995 CABO Code, at Section 807.1, requires an attic access opening not less than 22 inches by 30 inches to any attic area having a clear height of over 30 inches. The commentary to the code states that this is due to the likelihood that access to the attic will be required to repair piping, electrical and mechanical systems located in the attic. As a practical matter, once access to the attic is provided, it is likely that some degree of storage will occur in the attic. Tables 802.4a through 802.4d in the CABO Code contain allowable spans for ceiling joists with limited attic storage and with no attic storage and the roof slope not steeper than 3 in 12. The criteria to determine if lighting is required in an attic solely due to the possibility of storage, is therefore tied to these two issues. If an attic access is provided due to the fact that the clear height of the attic is over 30 inches and the ceiling joists are designed to accommodate limited storage because the roof slope exceeds 3 in 12, lighting of the attic is required.

Question 2: Assuming lighting is required in the attic, where is the control switch for such lighting to be located?

Answer 2: The NEC states that at least one point of control shall be at the usual point of entry to the attic space. The NEC also states that the light fixture shall contain a switch or be controlled by a wall switch. It is the intent of the code that the light switch, whether integral to the fixture or wall mounted, be accessible prior to entering the attic space itself. The switch therefore must be located either outside of the point of access or directly inside the point of access to allow one to activate the light fixture prior to entering the attic space.