CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT
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ACCREDITED Building Department

TO: Development Services Customers

SUBJECT: **INFORMATION BULLETIN 540**
Portable Storage Units (Pods and Shipping Containers)

DATE: September 13, 2011/*Revised January 28, 2019/September 18, 2025*

CREATED BY: Land Development / Plan Review / Field Services Divisions

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Purpose:

As a customer service initiative, the Development Services Department (DSD) has created this **revised** Information Bulletin (IB) 540 to assist Department customers in understanding the requirements in conjunction with portable storage units as a primary, secondary/accessory, temporary and converted use. This IB has also been revised to address these applications in residential and non-residential zoning districts.

Definitions

Portable storage units are containers used solely for the shipping and/or storage and the transportation of materials, inventory or products and constructed in a manner to provide for structural integrity and designed to be placed directly on the ground without a foundation, have no wheels or axle and may have no utilities connected to them. The UDC classifies such storage as either shipping container or moving pods based on the following definitions:

Storage (shipping container) - A unit designed for the storage and/or shipment of goods by means of boat, train or truck. Portable storage containers are self-contained units which do not have or ever had axles or wheels directly attached to them permanently or temporarily.

Storage (moving pods) - A self-contained container used for the temporary storage and/or moving of small amounts of goods such as a household's contents or office tenants contents.

Scope:

Types of Uses for Portable Storage Units

A portable storage unit impacts zoning and building codes, as well as Permitting, Inspections and Code Enforcement based on four types of use: Primary, Secondary, Temporary and Converted.

- **Primary use** – Primary use of a Moving Pod in residential zoning districts is limited by default to a temporary use of no more than 60-days. The permanent use of a Moving Pod in Residential is not allowed. A Moving Pod in non-residential zoning districts is allowed on a permanent basis per the UDC but may require a rezoning to obtain a Specific Use Authorization depending on the zoning.

  The primary use of a shipping container is only for on-site sales of shipping containers in commercial zoning districts, or use as part of the business practice of moving goods and

materials in industrial zoning districts. Shipping Containers are not allowed on a permanent basis in residential, but for non-residential may be allowed with a rezoning to obtain a Specific Use Authorization depending on the zoning district.

- **Secondary/Accessory Use** – The use of a portable storage unit(s) for permanent storage of other goods and materials where there is a primary building on a lot. For residential use, this is typically a garage, carport, storage shed, greenhouse, gazebo, or a pool house, among other things.

- **Temporary Use** – The use of a portable storage unit(s) for storage of goods and materials without alteration.

- **Converted** – The use of portable storage units as building materials to create residential or commercial structures for habitable purposes (which could include storage). Habitable includes single family dwelling units, commercial restaurants, apartments, and any other building constructed out of multiple storage containers. The use of the storage container as a building material must meet the building codes, i.e. International Residential Code or International Building Code.

IB 540 Portable Storage Units				
	Residential		**Commercial/Industrial**	
	Moving Pod	**Shipping Container**	**Moving Pod**	**Shipping Container**
Primary Use	60-days Maximum	Not Allowed	Check the Zoning District Table 311.2	Check the Zoning District Table 311.2. Permit required if 300 sq. ft. or larger
Secondary Use	Building Permit and Altered with siding and roof	Building Permit and Altered with siding and roof	Check Zoning if allowed. Even under an "S" in the zoning table, allowed with a building permit and altered with siding and a roof	Check Zoning if allowed. Even if under "S" in the zoning table, allowed with a building permit and altered with siding and a roof
Temporary Use	60-days Maximum	With a Residential Building Permit, allowed for 30-days with a Temporary Use Permit issued	Allowed on a construction site for the length of the construction project	Allowed on a construction site for the length of the construction project
Converted Use	Allowed as a type of building material with a Residential Building Permit for a Home	Allowed as a type of building material with a Residential Building Permit for a Home	Allowed as a type of building material with a Commercial Building Permit	Allowed as a type of building material with a Commercial Building Permit

Portable storage unit must meet the zoning setback and yard requirement of the UDC. The measurement of the setback and yards shall be determined in accordance with Information Bulletin 565. Determination of yard location shall be determined in accordance with Information Bulletin 539. The placement of Shipping Containers or Moving Pods, either as a converted use, accessory use, temporary use, shall comply with setbacks as defined in the UDC in Table 35-310.01 "Lot and Building Dimensions Table" and, if applicable, Section 35-371 "Accessory Structures.

Shipping Container/Moving Pods Storage as a Primary Use

Storage of Shipping Containers or Moving Pods as a primary use shall comply with the use regulations per Tables 35-311-1 "Residential Use Matrix", or per Tables 35-311-2 "Non-Residential Use Matrix" and Table 35-311-2a "Non-Residential Use Matrix" depending on the zoning District. The designation "P" means permitted. The designation "S' means that a Specific Use Authorization – requiring a re-zoning application and approval through the Zoning Commission and City Council.

TABLE 311-1 RESIDENTIAL USE MATRIX																			
PERMITTED USE	***RP***	***RE***	***R-20***	***NP-15***	***NP-10***	***NP-8***	***R-6***	***RM-6***	***R-5***	***RM-5***	***R-4***	***RM-4***	***MF -18***	***MF-25***	***MF-33***	***MF-40***	***MF-50***	***ERZD***	***LBCS***
Storage/Moving Pods *up to 60 days within any 12 month period*	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Storage (Shipping Container)	Not permitted in residential zoning districts																		

TABLE 311-2 NON-RESIDENTIAL USE MATRIX													
	PERMITTED USE	**O-1 &**	**O-2**	**NC**	**C-1**	**C-2**	**C-3**	**D**	**L**	**I-1**	**I-2**	**ERZD**	**(LBCS)**
Storage	Storage, Moving Pod (see definition in Appendix A)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	S	
Storage	Storage Shipping Container (see definition in Appendix A. Requires registration affidavit with Development Services Dept.)	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	P	P	P	S	

Shipping Container/Moving Pods Storage as an Secondary/Accessory Use

An accessory use for residential is typically a garage, carport, storage shed, greenhouse, gazebo, or a pool house, among other things. For commercial, the use may be limited to a storage shed. The use of Shipping Containers or Moving Pods as a secondary/accessory use may be allowed on residential or commercial parcels, subject to certain limitations. For residential zoning districts, the use of a shipping container, regardless of the size of the container, is permitted if the shipping container is modified to meet all requirements of UDC Section 35-370 (b) Accessory Structures, as well as the International Residential Code (IRC) or the International Building Code (IBC). This includes submittal of a permit application and inspections. Since an Accessory use is considered permanent, and a shipping container is not allowed in a residential zoning district, the approval to issue a permit includes the requirement to alter the looks of the shipping container to include some type of siding and roof material.

For non-residential zoning districts, the requirement to alter the look depends on whether the portable storage unit is allowed by right or by specific use authorization under the zoning

district. Altering a storage unit for non-residential is not required if the unit is allowed under the zoning table. However if the zoning district requires a specific use authorization, and the zoning of the parcel does not have that designation, the storage unit may still be used if altered by permit application and inspections as in residential above.

A building permit, when required to alter a portable storage unit to become an accessory structure, must meet all requirements for the permitting of any accessory structures. This includes the requirements for foundations with engineered designs and inspections. In addition since a portable storage unit is fundamentally a structure manufactured to transport goods, to change the use from transportation to a permanent accessory structure, the application for permit requires a description of how the storage unit will be altered with exterior wall and roof materials to not "look" like a shipping container or moving pod.

See the Residential Improvement Permit Application to receive a permit for a residential accessory structure.
See the Commercial Application Guide and BuildSA Link to receive a permit for a commercial accessory structure.

Shipping Container/Moving Pods Storage as a Temporary Use

The use of shipping containers is not allowed in residential zones. However, a Temporary Use permit may be granted by the Building Official for no more than 30 days when the use of the shipping container is associated with a construction project on the same parcel of land and used to store project related tools, materials, or equipment. Temporary Use permits may be extended on a case by case basis. The temporary use of shipping containers does not require a foundation and the container may be placed directly on the ground or on pavement. The placement of Shipping Containers as a temporary use where permitted, shall not require modification to any building code or screening during the permitted time period. The storage container shall be removed 10 days after the completion of the construction project. Temporary storage units are allowed within the front yard area but behind minimum front and side building setback lines for a period of up to 60 days within any rolling 12 month period. Temporary use permits are not required for storage pods used in accordance with the Unified Development Code.

For commercial, temporary use is allowed on a construction site without any permit during construction prior to the certificate of occupancy issued.

Summary:

This Information Bulletin is for informational purposes only and is intended to assist customer with the appropriate use of portable storage units in non-residential zoning area.

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Version History – IB 540

Version Number	Date of Revision	Summary of Changes	Author of Changes
	May 1 2025	Updated to the 2024 I-Codes and Accela Link	Chamberlin
	Sept 18 2025	Updated Residential requirement for a permit under 300 sq ft	Chamberlin