

**NC Department of Insurance
Office of the State Fire Marshal - Engineering Division
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Plenums Versus Habitable Rooms

Code: 2012 Mechanical Code
Section: 602.1

Date: September 1, 2011

Question:

Would a habitable room be considered a plenum if it is used as part of the return air path from an adjacent habitable room or would a habitable room be considered a plenum if an HVAC unit with a free return is located within the room?

Answer:

No, Section 602.1 and Section 202 define a plenum as an enclosed portion of the building structure that is designed to allow air movement and thereby serve as part of an air distribution system. Plenums are limited to uninhabited crawl spaces, areas above a ceiling or below the floor, attic spaces, and mechanical equipment rooms. The code does not consider a habitable room intended for human occupancy containing air handling equipment with a free return to be a plenum space.