

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

**Code:** 2002 NC Mechanical Code  
**Section:** 602.1

**Date:** June 13, 2005

**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 a hvac unit with a free return is located within the room?

**Answer:**

No, Section 602.1 of the 2002 NC Mechanical Code defines 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. Please note that the Mechanical Code definition of a plenum differs somewhat from the dictionary definition and the way the term is commonly used. One must keep this difference in mind as one reads and interprets the code.