

NFIP's Community Rating System (CRS) Class 8 Freeboard Prerequisite

Frequently Asked Questions

November 2020

The Community Rating System (CRS) is a voluntary program that provides flood insurance premium discounts to communities that implement programs and measures that exceed the minimum floodplain management requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The CRS determines discounts based on credit points provided for floodplain management activities. To achieve certain CRS Class ratings, communities must meet certain program prerequisites in addition to obtaining the credit points. In January 2021, the CRS will implement a new Class 8 prerequisite for freeboard for all participating and new CRS communities. Below are some frequently asked questions about the CRS Class 8 freeboard prerequisite. Answers to questions 1–12 were released in July 2020. Questions 13–17 were added in October 2020. Questions 16 and 17 were clarified in November 2020.

A community with additional questions about the prerequisite or the CRS should contact its ISO/CRS Specialist. For a list of ISO/CRS Specialists, see the [CRS Resources website](#). State NFIP Coordinators or FEMA Regional CRS Coordinators can assist with model ordinance or sample regulatory language for freeboard, and other higher regulatory standards. A list of [State NFIP Coordinators](#) can be found here. Contact information for FEMA is available at the [FEMA website](#).

1. What is the new CRS Class 8 freeboard prerequisite?

Section 211 of the 2017 *CRS Coordinator's Manual* will be changed to read:

“In order to be a Class 8 or better . . .

- (1) The community must meet all the Class 9 prerequisites.
- (2) The community must adopt and enforce at least a 1-foot freeboard requirement (including machinery and equipment) for all residential buildings constructed, substantially improved, and/or reconstructed due to substantial damage, throughout its Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) where base flood elevations have been determined on the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) or in the Flood Insurance Study (FIS), except those areas that receive open space credit under Activity 420 (Open Space Preservation).”

2. Why is FEMA making freeboard a Class 8 prerequisite in the CRS?

The goal is to further the flood resiliency of our Nation. FEMA is working to ensure that homes are built to better withstand natural disasters, including floods. The CRS credits community efforts that exceed the minimum floodplain management requirements of the NFIP.

Freeboard—a margin of safety added to the level of the base flood—definitively exceeds those minimum standards. Research shows that higher regulatory standards reduce future flood

damage, and the importance is recognized by over 80% of CRS communities who already require freeboard. With freeboard in place, homes are not only better protected from flood damage, but also flood insurance costs less. The expense of elevating a new home an additional foot often can be recaptured in lower flood insurance premiums over 5 years or less.

3. How will the change in the 2017 CRS Coordinator's Manual be made?

FEMA will issue an addendum to the 2017 *CRS Coordinator's Manual* that will be effective on January 1, 2021. CRS communities and the Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO) will continue to use the 2017 *Coordinator's Manual* along with the 2021 Addendum, until such time that FEMA issues a new *Coordinator's Manual*, likely not before 2023.

4. Which CRS communities does the Class 8 freeboard prerequisite affect?

The Class 8 freeboard prerequisite affects Class 5 through Class 8 communities. The prerequisite will not affect Class 9 communities. Communities in Classes 1 through 4 already meet the new freeboard prerequisite.

5. When will the Class 8 freeboard prerequisite be applied to participating CRS communities?

The Class 8 freeboard prerequisite will be required of CRS communities at their first CRS cycle verification visit after January 1, 2021. Ordinance, regulatory, or building code language that meets the Class 8 prerequisite must be adopted, and provisions must be enforced, no later than the first cycle visit after January 1, 2021. However, an earlier date for community enforcement of the Class 8 freeboard prerequisite may be required in a new (2023 or later) *CRS Coordinator's Manual*. This means that communities that are not due for a cycle visit until 2023 or later should not wait to adopt the freeboard requirement.

6. Can a community still join or participate in the CRS without a freeboard requirement?

Yes. Any community that meets the CRS Class 9 prerequisites can apply to join the CRS and become a Class 9 community. Any already-participating CRS community that cannot meet the Class 8 freeboard prerequisite at its first cycle visit after 2021 will change to a Class 9 community (see previous question).

7. Where must a community require at least 1 foot of freeboard?

Communities must enforce the freeboard requirement for all residential buildings that are new, substantially improved, and/or reconstructed due to substantial damage throughout the SFHA where base flood elevations have been determined on the FIRM or in the FIS. This means all “numbered zones” in the SFHA. The CRS will not require freeboard in unnumbered zones within the SFHA.

8. The prerequisite includes all residential buildings. Does this include manufactured homes?

Yes. At least 1 foot of freeboard is required for manufactured homes, including machinery and equipment.

9. If a community adopts the International Code Council codes, will it meet the requirements for the Class 8 freeboard prerequisite?

Yes, provided that the adopted building code includes freeboard for residential buildings and the community is enforcing the freeboard provisions. This includes adopted state building codes that are enforced in the community. The CRS credits other higher standards included in building codes. For example, coastal CRS communities that have adopted and enforce recent building codes and have newer FIRMs often can qualify for Coastal A Zones credit under Activity 430 (Higher Regulatory Standards).

10. Should a community require more than 1 foot of freeboard?

All communities are encouraged to consider adopting additional freeboard. This may mean freeboard in all flood zones. It may mean more than 1 foot of freeboard. It may mean applying the freeboard standard to all building types. Remember, CRS credit is available for the enforcement of freeboard under CRS Activity 430 (Higher Regulatory Standards).

11. Will communities receive CRS credit for the enforcement of freeboard for residential buildings?

Yes. Communities will continue to receive freeboard credit (FRB) under Activity 430 (Higher Regulatory Standards) for enforcing freeboard for residential buildings. Communities that already receive FRB credit will continue to receive FRB credit. The basic FRB credit in the CRS is 100 points. FRB credit is higher when more freeboard is required or when elevation on fill is not allowed. An impact adjustment is applied to FRB credit.

12. What should CRS communities do in light of the Class 8 prerequisite?

Communities that currently enforce freeboard should check their floodplain ordinances and/or building codes to be sure that machinery and equipment are included, that substantially improved buildings are included, and that the provisions are being enforced.

Communities that do not now enforce at least 1 foot of freeboard for all new or substantially improved residential buildings, including machinery and equipment, within numbered zones of the SFHA will need to make changes to their floodplain ordinance and/or building code. Adoption and enforcement of the freeboard must occur before the community's first CRS cycle visit after January 1, 2021.

Answers to questions 13 through 17, below, were provided in October 2020. In November 2020, more information was provided for question 13 and clarifications were made to questions 16 and 17.

13. What residential buildings are included in the Class 8 freeboard requirement?

The Class 8 freeboard prerequisite applies to all residential buildings, whether single-family, multi-family, or manufactured. Note that one goal of the freeboard prerequisite is that all residential buildings benefit from a flood insurance rate based on a building elevation of at least 1 foot above the base flood elevation (BFE+1). For a full definition of "residential," see Appendix L of the NFIP's *Flood Insurance Manual*.

14. Does the Class 8 prerequisite include the replacement of manufactured homes in pre-FIRM manufactured home parks? And can the replaced manufactured home be 48 inches above grade to meet the Class 8 prerequisite?

The Class 8 freeboard prerequisite applies to all manufactured homes. All manufactured homes in numbered zones of the SFHA must have at least 1 foot of freeboard above the base flood elevation. This is consistent with the 2015 and 2018 International Residential Codes. A requirement that the manufactured home be 48 inches above grade is not by itself sufficient to meet the 1-foot freeboard requirement.

15. Are historic buildings subject to the Class 8 freeboard prerequisite?

No, historic structures (as defined in 44 *C.F.R* §59.1) that are allowed an exemption (or variance) as anticipated by 44 *C.F.R* §60.3 for substantial improvements may be exempt (or varied) from the Class 8 prerequisite. For CRS purposes, documentation of the exemption may be requested. A community interested in providing for the treatment of historic structures within its floodplain ordinance should contact its state historic preservation office or the FEMA Regional Office about recommended language.

16. May machinery and equipment be floodproofed instead of elevated to at least 1 foot above base flood elevation to meet the Class 8 freeboard prerequisite?

No. To meet the Class 8 prerequisite the building code or ordinance must require machinery or equipment to be elevated to at least 1 foot above the base flood elevation for buildings newly constructed, substantially improved, and/or reconstructed due to substantial damage. This requirement includes machinery and equipment placed within attached garages and/or within enclosures below elevated buildings, with the exception of utility meters and equipment specifically designed to withstand inundation according to the standards of the International Residential Codes and the NFIP. A community that allows floodproofing around machinery and equipment in lieu of elevation to the freeboard level does not meet the prerequisite.

17. Does the freeboard requirement for Class 8 apply to attached garages?

The Class 8 freeboard prerequisite will be met provided that attached garages and enclosures below elevated buildings meet the minimum requirements of the NFIP (elevated to the base flood elevation or having proper openings). As noted in question 16, all machinery and equipment in attached garages or in enclosures must be elevated to the freeboard level.