

# *REQUIREMENTS REGARDING THE USE OF PROFESSIONAL SEALS AND THE PRACTICE OF ARCHITECTURE, REGISTERED INTERIOR DESIGN AND ENGINEERING IN THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA.*

## *“The Seal Brochure”*

To safeguard the public life, safety, welfare and property the State of North Carolina requires that individuals who practice architecture and engineering be licensed. Additionally, individuals who use the title Registered Interior Designer and offer interior design services as defined in North Carolina General Statute 83A must hold a registration. Answers and illustrations to frequent questions are provided for clarity. Detailed reviews of the North Carolina Building Code, the General Statutes and Rules of the State Boards of Architecture, Registered Interior Designers and Engineering are necessary.

## General Guidelines

Can Architects prepare and seal engineering plans?

Although “incidental” engineering is permitted if it is included in the architectural plans, Architects are not permitted to design complete electrical, mechanical, plumbing, civil or structural engineering systems.

Can Professional Engineers prepare and seal architectural plans?

Although building design is permitted, if within the area of competence of the Professional Engineer, they may not represent the work as architecture and shall not seal drawings labeled as architectural (“A” Sheets) or be listed as the “Architectural” Designer on the Appendix B – Building Code Summary.

Can Registered Interior Designers prepare and seal architectural and/or engineering plans?

Registered Interior Designer’s seals are only permissible for specific interior design work/plans as defined and detailed in NC General Statutes-Chapter 83A-1 (5a), (6a), (8) and (9).

Can a licensee or registrant use electronic seals and digital signatures?

Architects: Permitted subject to detailed requirements described in rule 21 NCAC 02 .0206 (d) and (e).

Registered Interior Designers: Permitted subject to detailed requirements in 21 NCAC 02 .0206 (d) and (e).

Engineers: Permitted subject to detailed requirements described in rule 21 NCAC 56 .1103(e).

Can a licensee or registrant seal another licensed or registered designer's standard design (prototypical) plans?

Architects: Yes, subject to special requirements detailed in rule 21 NCAC 02 .0206(b), including disclaimer.

Registered Interior Designers: Yes, subject to special requirements detailed in rule 21 NCAC 02 .0206(b), including disclaimer.

Engineers: Yes, subject to special requirements detailed in rule 21 NCAC 56 .1106, including disclaimer.

Can licensees or registrants use signature reproductions such as rubber stamps or computer-generated facsimiles on paper documents?

Signature reproductions are prohibited by all three professions. Seal reproductions are permitted.

Can an individual licensed or registered in another jurisdiction engage in temporary practice in NC before obtaining a license?

No.

Can a licensee or registrant allow another individual to use their seal?

No, a licensed or registered individual may not allow another individual to use their seal under any circumstances.

Is firm licensure or registration required? If so, must a firm seal be placed on documents?

Architects: Yes, firm licensure is required if the services are being offered through an incorporated entity or company. A firm seal must be placed on the cover sheet of each set of plans and specifications as set forth in 21 NCAC 02 .0206 (12).

Registered Interior Designers: Yes, firm registration is required if the services are being offered through an incorporated entity or company. A firm seal must be placed on the cover sheet of each set of plans and specifications as set forth in 21 NCAC 02 .0206 (12).

Engineers: Firm licensure is required. A seal is not required, but the firm license number, name and address must be on the title block as set forth in 21 NCAC 56 .1103.

What are the sealing requirements for plans/drawings?

Architects must seal all plans and specifications for use in this state. (“For use in this state” means drawings and specifications prepared for bidding, procurement, permitting, or for construction.)

Registered Interior Designers must seal all plans and specifications for use in this state. (“For use in this state” means drawings and specifications prepared for bidding, procurement, permitting, or for construction.)

Engineers: The licensee must certify all engineering work in compliance with 21 NCAC 56 .1103. Certification includes seal, date of signature and signature.

## Exemptions

*While there are certain statutory exemptions from the requirements of a professional Architect’s or Engineer’s seal, it is important that the code official exercise judgment to require seals where necessary to protect the public. An Architect, Registered Interior Designer or Engineer must seal all his/her work, regardless of the exemptions. In addition to the guidance below, the Board of Architecture & Registered Interior Designers has published a non-binding interpretive statement on NCGS 83A-1(5a), you will find at this [link](#).*

Single family residences are exempt from an Architect’s seal if the single structure is less than eight units attached and each unit has its own exit on grade level. However, the Board of Architecture and Registered Interior Designers has opined that if the total number of attached residential units in a project exceeds eight, then public protection necessitates having the plans prepared and sealed by an architect or engineer. A guideline statement is found at this [link](#).

Farm buildings are exempt from an Architect’s seal if they are not for public use.

New commercial structures with less than 3,000 Sq. Ft. are exempt from an Architect’s seal. New commercial structures that are less than \$300,000 in construction costs are exempt from an Architect’s seal. [A guidance statement is found at this link.](#)

Plans for oneself are exempt from an Architect’s seal but must be drawn and signed by the actual owner of the building (i.e., minister cannot sign church’s plans). Specifications required to obtain a building permit are not exempt and must be sealed by a design professional. A guideline statement is found at this [link](#).

Plans for alterations, remodeling or renovations of an existing building are exempt from an Architect’s seal if the following criteria is met:

- the changes do not alter or affect the structural system.
- the changes do not affect the access or exit patterns.
- the changes do not affect the live or dead loads.
- the changes do not affect “a change of use” per the N.C. Building Code.

Plans for alterations or up-fitting of a shell or unfinished structure are exempt from an Architect’s seal if the structure has a current certificate of occupancy and still meets the exemptions for changes to non-

exempt structures.

Plans for churches and faith-based institutions are not exempt from design professional seals.

## *What Types of Documents Require a design professional seal?*

### *Architects and Registered Interior Designers:*

Plans for bidding, permitting, construction and procurement must be sealed. Specifications must be sealed.

Construction change orders must be sealed if the documents are prepared by a licensee or registrant.

Addenda and field changes are required to be sealed if changes affect aspects of health, safety, and welfare of the public.

Note that post construction “Record Drawings” ***are not required*** to be sealed by an Architect or Registered Interior Designer; however, the Architect’s or Registered Interior Designer’s name must be on the documents and there must be a disclaimer as set forth in 21 NCAC 02 .0206(c).

### *Engineers:*

If prepared by the Engineer, they must certify post construction “Record Drawings” in compliance with 21 NCAC 56 .1103 with a disclaimer as to source of record drawing information (i.e., contractor markups, inspections, etc.)

## *What types of documents are not required to be sealed by the design professional?*

Architects and Registered Interior Designers shall not sign and seal their presentation documents (renderings used to communicate conceptual information only) that are not a part of a set of drawings or construction documents.

Engineers are not required sign and seal a presentation document but must reference a signed and sealed document, unless it is a preliminary document.

Architects and/or Registered Interior Designers may release documents for interim review without their seal, but they shall be dated, bear the Architect’s or Registered Interior Designer’s name and be conspicuously marked “not for construction” per 21 NCAC 02 .0206.

Engineers are not required to seal incomplete documents if they are marked, “preliminary, not for construction,” per 21 NCAC 56 .1103(c).

Can a Professional Engineer, Architect or Registered Interior Designer seal sheets or pages prepared by licensed professional consultants?

Neither Architects nor Registered Interior Designers may seal sheets or pages prepared by licensed professional consultants such as structural, mechanical, or electrical engineers retained by Architect or Registered Interior Designer. The documents shall bear the seal and license number of the engineering consultant responsible for the work. [Refer to 21 NCAC 02 .0206](#)

Engineers may only certify sheets personally prepared by the licensee or under the engineer's "responsible charge" per 21 NCAC 56 .0701(d).

Can non-exempt plans bearing seal of one discipline (Civil, Structural, Mechanical/Electrical, Architecture or Registered Interior Design) combined with non-sealed drawings of other disciplines be accepted for bidding, permitting or construction or procurement?

No, all drawings must be sealed and signed by the appropriate professional.

### *Limitations of a licensee or registrant.*

Can a licensee or registrant seal an opinion letter or report stating whether plans that were prepared by another individual comply with the building code?

Architects and Registered Interior Designers may only seal plans and specifications they prepared and are for use in this state. They shall not place their seal on any letter, report or form.

Engineers: Yes, if hired by an agency or the owner to specifically do a code review of plans already bearing the valid seal of a licensee.

Can a licensee or registrant seal a document that was not prepared under his or her responsible control or responsible charge?

Architects, Engineers, and Registered Interior Designers may only seal work product that they prepared personally or was done under their responsible control or responsible charge.

Can a licensee or registrant modify, and seal drawings previously sealed by another licensee or registrant who was terminated by the owner without completely redrawing them?

Architects, Engineers, and Registered Interior Designers may modify and seal another's drawings if they clearly mark modifications and put a written disclaimer on the plans indicating the exact portion of the work that was done under his/her responsible charge/responsible control. [The Board of Architecture and Registered Interior Designers has a policy on this subject found at this link.](#)

Can a licensee or registrant seal plans that were started by or contracted for by a person not properly licensed or registered?

Architects and Registered Interior Designers may not seal work begun by a non-licensed or registered individual unless the Architect or Registered Interior Designer completely redraws the project making it his/her own work product and documents the work in a design file. [Refer to 21 NCAC 02 .0203 \(11\)](#)

Engineers may not seal work begun by non-licensed individuals unless the engineers make the project his/her own work product and exercises responsible charge over the work as set forth in 21 NCAC 56 .0701(d).

### *WHOM CAN I CONTACT?*

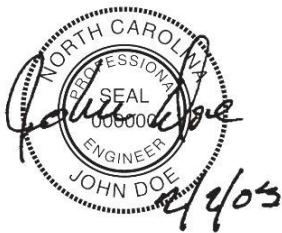
Architects and Registered Interior Designers: 919-268-7293 or [ncba@ncbarch.org](mailto:ncba@ncbarch.org) Engineers: 919-791-2000 or [ncbels@ncbels.org](mailto:ncbels@ncbels.org).

### *PROPER SEALS*

Seals properly signed and dated on paper documents:  
ARCHITECT INDIVIDUAL AND FIRM SEAL GRAPHIC



ENGINEER INDIVIDUAL SEAL GRAPHIC



REGISTERED INTERIOR DESIGNER INDIVIDUAL AND FIRM SEAL GRAPHIC



Acceptable statements on documents include:

- Preliminary – Do not use for construction.
- Progress drawings – Do not use for construction.
- Final Drawing – For review purposes only.
- Proper statements for engineers are found in 21 NCAC 56 .1103(c).

## *RED FLAGS FOR PLAN REVIEWERS*

Be alert to these issues:

- Architectural (“A”) sheets sealed by an Engineer.
- Architectural (“A”) sheets sealed by a Registered Interior Designer or listed as the Architectural Designer on the Appendix B.
- Architectural and/or Engineering sheets sealed by a Registered Interior Designer.
- Engineering (“E”, “C”, “S”, “P”, “M”) sheets sealed by an Architect or Registered Interior Designer.
- Plans sealed by an Architect, Registered Interior Designer or Engineer who is an employee of a non-licensed firm or company, such as a general contractor or developer.
- Incomplete documents sealed without a disclaimer.
- Plans that have not been sealed, signed and dated by the licensee or registrant.
- Standard design or prototype documents or plans that do not bear the seal of the original preparer.
- Standard design or prototype documents or plans that do not bear the seal of a NC licensee or registrant and a disclaimer.
- Plans for up-fitting a shell structure without a current certificate of occupancy.
- Unsealed church or faith-based building plans stating that the “plans are for oneself.”
- Seals appear to be cut and pasted.
- Signatures are identical on each sheet (rubber stamp signature, digitized or scanned).
- Contact person is not the licensee or registrant, or it is difficult to contact the licensee or registrant.
- Plans, details, letter reports, etc. do not appear to apply to the project.
- Plans have numerous or serious code violations.
- Non-dated revisions.

## *WHAT TO DO?*

- Question the design professional as to circumstances and qualifications.
- Advise the design professional on your interpretation of the code and suggest a change that would meet the code
- Request corrective action
- Reject the plans
- Contact Board
- File a complaint
- 

*This is a joint publication of the NC Board of Architecture and Registered Interior Designers and the NC Board of Examiners for Engineers and Surveyors. Originally published 2003.*

*Revised 2016, 2022, 10/2023, 3/2026.*