



# Do I Need a Permit for My Project?



This brochure provides general information about the types of work that require a permit, and those that do not. As the owner of a one or two family dwelling, you can hire a licensed contractor to get the proper permits and complete work, or in most cases, you can obtain permits and do the work yourself.

## Why do I need permits?

- **It's the law.** State Building Code requires that permits be obtained for certain types of work. Permits provide a legal record of work performed.
- **Permits protect** you, your family and your investment. (They are designed to help ensure that licensed contractors do the work when required.)
- **Inspections** ensure that work is done safely and that it meets the minimum code requirements.
- **Minor problems** that could lead to costly repairs, liability and life/safety issues can be detected during permit inspections and brought to your attention before the situation worsens.
- **When selling a property,** the buyer, realtor and/or lender may require that unpermitted work be corrected, properly permitted and inspected before closing.
- **Lack of permits** and inspection approvals may void homeowner's insurance.

## Where can I get a permit?

Visit the Development Services Center ground floor at 1900 SW 4th Ave.

**For Hours Call** 503-823-7310

Planning & Zoning 503-823-7526

Visit our website for current hours  
[www.portlandoregon.gov/bds](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds)

## One and Two Family Residential Dwellings

Permits are required for many types of work that you may need or desire to have done on your property. Listed in this handout is work requiring and not requiring permits. This information is not all inclusive, so when in doubt about a permitting need please check with BDS Staff in the Development Services Center.

### Work requiring a building permit

- Build a one or two family dwelling
- Build, demolish or add a room, garage, shed, or other enclosed structure attached to a house
- Build, demolish or move any detached structure that is more than 200 square feet in area or more than 10 feet high from the floor to the average height of the roof
- Add or enlarge a porch cover, patio cover, carport or other open-sided roofed structure with a cumulative area greater than 200 square feet that is attached to a house
- Enclose a patio cover, porch or carport
- Finish an attic, garage or basement to create habitable space
- Add a bathroom in new or existing space
- Cut new window or door opening, widen or reduce the size of existing openings
- Move, remove or add walls
- Build or replace an exterior stairway more than 30 inches above grade
- Build a retaining wall that exceeds four feet high measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall or any retaining wall affected by the weight of an adjacent slope, or nearby driveway or structure
- Build a deck more than 30 inches high
- Put up a fence more than seven feet high
- Move more than 10 cubic yards of earth
- Pour concrete sidewalks, slabs and driveways more than 30 inches above adjacent grade or over any story or basement
- Install a barrier around a swimming pool
- Replace roofing in a wildfire hazard zone
- Reroof a house or duplex when more than 15% of the existing roof sheathing is being removed and replaced
- Tree planting, preservation, or related requirements may apply to your project under Title 11, Trees (the Tree Code). To find out more about these regulations and how they affect your project please visit [www.portlandoregon.gov/trees](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/trees) or call 503-823-TREE (8733) or visit the Bureau of Development Services Center and speak with a City Planner.

### Work requiring a zoning permit

- Build or install a garage or carport less than or equal to 200 square feet in area and less than 10 feet in height from the floor to the average height of the roof to confirm the location on the site complies with zoning code requirements
- Create a new or enlarged parking area or driveway, or pave a previously graveled parking area
- Make any improvement required as a condition of your land use review approval which does not require a building permit
- Make any alteration to exterior development, including site work such as, constructing a patio or deck, clearing trees, or installing landscaping in any zone with restrictions on development

## Work requiring a mechanical permit

- Install or change any part of a heating or cooling system which has duct work or must be vented into any kind of chimney or vent
- Install a wood stove or fireplace insert
- Install, alter or repair gas piping between the meter and an appliance (indoors and outdoors)
- Install a fuel oil tank

## Work requiring an electrical permit

You must be both the owner and occupant of the dwelling in order to do electrical work yourself. If the dwelling is intended for sale, lease, rent or exchange in the near future, work must be done by a licensed electrical contractor. A permit is required to:

- Install, change or repair any hard-wired electrical system
- Run any additional wiring, put in an additional electrical outlet or light fixture, or change your fuse box to circuit breakers
- Install or alter low voltage systems such as security alarms, central vacuum systems, or low voltage lighting
- Add or replace electrical wall/baseboard heaters

## Work requiring a plumbing permit

- Repair, replace, relocate or add to the piping system within your home
- Install new plumbing fixtures such as toilets, sinks, showers, tubs, dishwashers, etc.
- Replace a water heater
- Replace existing plumbing fixtures if the replacement involves concealed plumbing connections
- Install rain drains, cesspools, septic systems, drywells, sewer lines, water lines, backflow prevention assemblies for lawn sprinkler systems or cap a sewer
- Cap of fixtures that have been removed

Note: Adding a bathroom not only requires a plumbing and building permit, but may also require an electrical and/or mechanical permit.

## Work not requiring a building permit

Some minor repairs and maintenance on one or two family dwellings do not require a building permit. The project must meet the Building and Zoning Code requirements even when a building permit is not required.

Additional Zoning regulations may apply to sites subject to land use reviews, sites within Overlay Zones -- such as Environmental, Design and Historic Resource Protection -- and sites within Plan Districts. For example, historic review may be required to paint the exterior of a Historic Landmark, design review may be required to replace exterior siding, or environmental review may be required to build a patio or deck. Minimum setbacks of 5 feet or greater may apply to sheds and other accessory structures. Call the Zoning Information Line 503-823-7526 to confirm the zoning rules for your site and project.

## Exterior Work

- Paint buildings
- Install insulation in existing homes
- Install storm windows
- Install window awnings, not more than 54 inches deep and not in a design zone, that are supported by an exterior wall and do not project beyond the property line
- Install gutters and downspouts (a plumbing permit may still be required for stormwater disposal)
- Replace or repair siding
- Replace or repair roofing, including replacement of no more than 15% of the existing roof sheathing (a maximum of three layers of roofing is allowed, except in a wildfire hazard zone)
- Replace doors or windows if the existing openings are not widened or reduced in size
- Install swings and other play structures
- Build a fence up to seven feet high (except in front setback areas – refer to the Fence Guide)
- Pave a walkway
- Build stairs, patio, or deck that is not more than 30 inches above grade
- Build a shed, garage or other detached non-habitable accessory building less than or equal to 200 square feet in area and less than 10 feet in height from the floor to average height of the roof and not less than 3 feet to the property line
- Repave driveways where expansion is not proposed
- Build a patio, porch cover or carport not over 200 square feet and supported by an exterior building wall

### Please note:

If your property is in a flood hazard area additional requirements apply, contact Site Development to discuss your project 503-823-6892.

## Interior Work

- Replace interior wall, floor or ceiling covering (such as wallboard or sheet vinyl)
- Install shelving and cabinets
- Remove and reinstall a toilet when installing new floor covering
- Replace accessible plumbing fixtures to make emergency plumbing repairs or to replace freeze-damaged or leaking concealed plumbing pipes that are no more than five feet in length

## Scheduling an inspection

- Call 503-823-7000, the BDS 24-hour inspection request line
- Enter your IVR or permit number
- Enter the three-digit inspection code for the type of inspection you are requesting
- Enter a phone number where you can be reached during weekdays and if you want the inspection in the morning or afternoon, or leave voicemail with plan location or lockbox code.
- There must be an adult over age 18 to let the inspector inside