



WHEN DO I NEED A PERMIT? A HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE

CITY OF PALMER DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

THIS DOCUMENT IS INTENDED TO BE A GUIDE FOR THOSE HOMEOWNERS INTERESTED IN IMPROVING THEIR HOMES TO DETERMINE IF A BUILDING PERMIT IS NEEDED FOR THE WORK THEY INTEND TO PERFORM. IT IS A GUIDE ONLY AND IS NOT ALL INCLUSIVE. FOR MORE ACCURATE INFORMATION A HOMEOWNER SHOULD CONTACT THEIR LOCAL BUILDING DEPARTMENT.

HOMEOWNERS AND PERMITS -- WHY SHOULD I GET PERMITS?

Your home is typically the largest personal financial investment you will make. Building permits and inspections help you to protect that investment by providing a reasonable assurance that a home is safe from structural failure, fire hazards, electrical hazards and health risks.

1. Permits provide a permanent record of the work performed and inspections are conducted on the home for insurance needs, resale value and general knowledge of the history of the home. If you improve or add-on to your home without permits and it fails, your insurance company may not help you with the liability.
2. Permits and inspections help to assure a level of work that is "code compliant" on your home resulting in a confidence level of safety and lasting construction to avoid big problems during the life of your home.
3. Work performed without permits can become frustrating and extremely costly; in some cases even deadly. Work that has been completed without a permit and discovered later can require an engineering evaluation and report, possible destructive testing, removal of wall coverings, and replacement plumbing, electrical or other various elements of the unpermitted construction at great cost and irritation to the homeowner or subsequent homeowner. There are documented cases of occupant deaths in fires involving unpermitted projects such as garage conversions because codes were not complied with and required proper ventilation and emergency egress were not provided.

Simply put, protect yourself, your family and your investment in your home by obtaining permits and inspections on home improvements, additions and/or any other work requiring a permit.

HOMEOWNERS AND PERMITS -- WHEN DO I NEED A PERMIT?

Generally speaking, the following guidelines should be used to determine when a permit is required however, to be certain, it is always best to contact your local building department. Staff at the City of Palmer Department of Community Development located at 645 E Cope Industrial Way are available to answer any project questions you may have Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. except on observed holidays.

A simple general rule for when a permit is required is:

1. If you add to the structure or build a new structure.
2. If you affect the "envelope" of the structure or, plainly, if you open up the interior or exterior walls of the structure.
3. For other than routine maintenance and service if you work on or add to the building's mechanical, electrical or plumbing system.
4. If you reconfigure any existing room, garage, patio, balcony, etc. into something new. For example, add a loft or enclose an existing loft, convert a garage into habitable space, etc.

The following offers a little more detail for when permits are required by type of permit but this is not all inclusive:

Building Improvements (Recommend professional)

A permit is required to:

1. Add a room or addition.
2. Build or move a carport, garage or shed.
3. Finish an attic, garage or basement to make additional living space.
4. Cut in a new window or door opening or widen existing openings.
5. Move or add walls.
6. Apply new roofing where all of the old roof sheathing is replaced.
7. Build a stairway.
8. Build a retaining wall more than 2 feet high. (If it's in the right-of-way, it will require Public Works Department permit.)

9. Build a deck. (Attached to the house at any height or free standing greater than 30 inches from ground level)
10. Build a block wall more than 2 feet high.

Electrical Improvements (Recommend professional)

A permit is required to:

1. Install or alter any permanent wiring or electrical device.
2. Run additional wiring to put in an electrical outlet or light fixture.
3. Change out, upgrade or relocate the existing main electrical panel.
4. Install a renewable energy system. (solar, wind, etc.)

Plumbing Improvements (Recommend professional)

A permit is required to:

1. Install or replace a water heater or water softener.
2. Alter piping inside a wall, ceiling or beneath a floor.
3. Remodel or add on to your home when existing plumbing is to be relocated. This includes installation of building sewers, water service and exterior drains.
4. Install a solar hot water system.

Mechanical Improvements (Recommend professional)

A permit is required to:

1. Install or change any part of a heating or cooling system.
2. Install or change any part of unvented decorative appliances.
3. Install, alter or repair gas piping between the meter and any appliance (indoors or outdoors); i.e. gas line for a BBQ, add a fire pit, pool/hot tub heater, etc.
4. Install bathroom fans, dryer exhausts, kitchen range exhausts and appliances that are required to be vented.

Again, this list is not all inclusive - it is a guide intended to help give you an understanding of the types of improvements or construction projects you may wish to perform on your home that would require a permit. Always check with your local building department before proceeding.

HOMEOWNERS AND PERMITS -- WHAT CAN I DO WITHOUT A PERMIT?

There are numerous things you can do to your house that do not require permits. Permits are NOT required for the following:

Buildings Improvements (Recommend professional)

1. Retaining walls that are not over 2 feet in height measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall.
2. Private concrete sidewalks, slabs, and driveways not more than 30 inches above adjacent grade and not over any basement or story below.
3. Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, countertops, interior wall, floor or ceiling covering, and similar finish work.
4. Swings and other playground equipment accessory to a one- or two-family dwelling.
5. Gutters and downspouts.
6. Door and window replacements (where no structural member is altered or changed).

Electrical Improvements (Recommend professional)

1. To remove and replace broken or damaged electrical outlets (like for like only).
2. To replace defective breakers (like for like only).
3. To replace light bulbs and fluorescent tubes.
4. To replace an existing garbage disposal, dishwasher, electric tank water heater, or similar appliance of 30 amps or less (like for like only).
5. To install low voltage wiring for garage door openers, cable TV, or burglar alarms.
6. To install phone outlets (wire must be listed type wire).
7. To install CATV – Community Access TV (wire must be listed type wire).
8. To replace an existing doorbell.

Plumbing Improvements (Recommend professional)

1. Repair/replace a sink.
2. Repair/replace a toilet.
3. Repair/replace a faucet (if not concealed in a wall).
4. Resurfacing/replacing countertops.
5. Resurfacing shower walls.
6. Repair/replace shower heads.
7. Repair/replace rain gutters and downspouts.
8. Add to or alter an irrigation system with an approved backflow device.
9. Re-grouting tile.
10. Replacing a water filter.
11. Replace a hose bib.
12. Install a fountain or other water feature that is filled by a hose 18 inches in depth or less.

Mechanical (Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning) Improvements (Recommend professional)

1. Portable heating appliances, cooking or clothes drying appliances.
2. Portable ventilation appliances.
3. Portable cooling units.
4. Steam, hot, or chilled water piping within any heating or cooling equipment regulated by the mechanical or plumbing code.
5. Replacement of any minor part that does not alter approval of equipment or make such equipment unsafe.
6. Portable evaporative coolers installed in windows; installation within a wall opening created for such will require a permit.
7. Portable appliances, such as freezers, washing machines, refrigerators, portable barbecue grill, etc.;
8. Change out furnace filters.

We cannot overemphasize the need to check with your local building department regarding which activities require a permit, and which do not. Once you have determined that you need a permit, please contact the building department or a licensed contractor for help in completing the next steps and process in obtaining a permit. **Should you have any questions, you may contact the City of Palmer Department of Community Development at 907-745-3709 x1 or online at www.palmerak.org.**

HOMEOWNERS AND PERMITS -- WHAT IF I'M A "DO IT YOURSELF" PERSON?

Do It Smart, Do It Safely.

If you are considering a 'Do-It-Yourself' home improvement project, it is important you find out if permits are required for your project and inquire about the applicable zoning and building requirements. Before beginning your project, be certain your home updates are both possible *and* legal.

Things to consider before you begin a project:

- A building permit ensures a certified inspector will examine the project to determine if the work is done safely and according to code. For do-it-yourselfers who don't do installations or construction work every day, this is valuable as it will give you the opportunity to ask questions of an expert in the field. Incorrect building or remodeling work can cause house fires, flood damage and structural problems.
- If a permit is required, don't proceed with work without it. You could be putting your home and family in jeopardy and setting the stage for costly repairs down the line.
- Be realistic about your skill level. Never take on a project that you will not be able to accomplish.
- If you are doing the work yourself, call your local building department. Getting a permit is often as simple as downloading a form and sending it in with the fee. However, more complex projects such as new construction for room additions or conversions may require detailed construction plans that may tax your skill level. If working with a licensed contractor, be sure to use their expertise and familiarity with the permitting process. In addition, make sure your contract clearly specifies who (you or your contractor) is responsible for obtaining required permits and inspection approvals.
- Check a contractor's license with the State of Alaska to ensure that a contractor is legally licensed and bonded to work in Alaska. Beware of a contractor willing to work without permits inside city limits. **INSIST ON PERMITS.**
- Use or insist that the contractor uses only licensed plumbers and electricians. Along with homeowners working on their own homes, only licensed plumbers and electricians are legally allowed to do plumbing or electrical work in Alaska.
- Always get copies of permits and inspections for your records.

The City of Palmer Community Development Department has personnel and resources to help you through the permit and inspection process. Do not hesitate to avail yourself of that expertise and resources.

Alaska State Statute 08.18.161 allows work performed by a homeowner who is building or improving a residential structure for their own occupancy. The sale or lease of the property within 2 years of completion of the work creates a rebuttable presumption upon the owner/builder intent of the exemption and is subject to investigation and action by the State of Alaska. It is strongly recommended that, whenever possible, properly licensed and trained professional contractors perform the work on all construction projects.

We are here ready to serve you and to help you achieve your construction project goals in a code compliant manner. Our objective is to help ensure the minimum level of safety and quality of work afforded by the technical building codes is attained in your project. We hope to see you soon.