



When Do I Need A Building Permit?

Handout No: 20
Revised: 9/27/22

A permit is required for most construction and/or repair projects including electrical, plumbing, mechanical, grading and demolition work. Section 106.1 of the administrative provisions of Section 14.10.010 of the Sonoma Municipal Code, states: "Any owner or authorized agent who intends to construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, demolish or change the occupancy of a building or structure, or to erect, install, enlarge, alter, repair, remove, convert or replace any electrical, gas, mechanical or plumbing system, the installation of which is regulated by this code, or to cause any such work to be done, shall first make application to the building official and obtain the required permit."

The following lists provide examples of work that requires a permit or is otherwise exempt. Please check with the City of Sonoma Building Department **prior** to starting a project to determine if a permit is necessary.

Permits ARE required for:

BUILDING

- New construction, additions, remodeling and alterations to a room, building or structure.
- Patio and porch enclosure, porch and sun rooms.
- Antenna towers.
- Pool, spa, hot tub (in- and above-ground – unless exempt).
- Pool re-plastering and pool repairs.
- Awnings (unless exempt).
- Reroof or change in roof slope.
- Carport and garage (new, conversion, remodel).
- Signs (unless exempt).
- Decks (unless exempt).
- Fireplaces and site-built barbeques.
- Retaining walls (unless exempt).
- Demolition (interior or exterior).
- Shower/tub wall repair and shower enclosures.
- Fences constructed of other than stone, masonry, or concrete, over 7 feet in total height.
- Fences constructed of stone, masonry, or concrete, over 6 feet in total height.
- Skylights (new and replacement).
- Siding and masonry veneer.
- Sidewalks and driveways (unless exempt).
- Stairways
- Garage and garage conversion.
- Storage shed, patio cover, trellis, arbor or tool shed, playhouse and other accessory structures (unless exempt).
- Handicap accessible restroom(s) and ramps.
- Handicap accessible parking or paths of travel.
- Insulation and radiant barriers.
- Spray booth (fire permit also required).
- Door replacements (except interior dwelling doors) or new door installations.
- Storage loft or platform.
- Windows and window replacement.
- Sliding glass doors.
- Partition wall.
- Playground equipment (unless exempt).
- Tenant improvements.
- Termite/dry rot repair.
- Nonresidential tents, canopies and membrane structures.
- Water storage tanks (unless exempt).
- Window awnings (unless exempt).

ELECTRICAL

- Cooktop, oven or range replacement if the location, type (gas or electric) or rating is changed.
- Temporary power poles.
- Wiring (new, extended, replacement, and upgrades).
- Exterior lighting (new or replacement).
- Electric or illuminated signs.
- Garage door opener only if adding outlet or wiring.
- Pool, spa/hot tub-related electrical.
- Wiring and wiring devices for appliances such as air conditioners, space heaters, dishwashers, washing machines, water heaters, clothes dryers, etc.
- Wiring and wiring devices for motors, generators, transformers, industrial heating, air conditioners and heat pumps, cooking and baking equipment, etc.
- Service panel or subpanel (new, replacement, relocated, or upgraded).
- Wiring devices (new) switch, outlet, etc.
- Solar Photovoltaic systems
- Energy Storage Systems (ESS)

PLUMBING

- Grease traps and interceptors.
- Dishwasher replacement.
- New dishwasher, garbage disposer or other plumbing appliances.
- Lawn sprinkler anti-siphon valves.
- Fire sprinklers.
- Sewer ejectors.
- New plumbing fixtures: bathtub, bidet, laundry tray, lavatory, shower, sink, toilet, etc.
- Solar water heater and solar water heating panels.
- Fixture replacement if plumbing is changed
- Sump pumps.
- Gas, water or sewer piping (new, replacement, and extensions).
- Water heater (new, replacement and relocated).
- Graywater systems.
- Swimming pool plumbing and equipment.

MECHANICAL (New or Replacement)

- Air conditioning and exhaust systems.
- Fireplace insert, wood stove, pellet stove, fireplaces, outdoor site-built barbeque.
- Central vacuum system.
- Exhaust fans.
- Commercial kitchen hoods & make-up air.
- Ventilation systems.
- Ducting and product-conveying systems.
- Heating unit (central furnace, wall furnace, floor furnace, unit heater).
- Extension of duct system.

GRADING (see Sonoma Municipal Code Section 14.20.025)

- Any changes to natural drainage courses.
 - Excavations (unless exempt).
 - Any grading work (unless exempt).
 - Storm water protection plan implementation.
-

Why do I need a permit?

The issuance of a building permit ensures that appropriate plans have been reviewed and the resulting construction is inspected to substantially meet local, State and Federal requirements to safeguard public health, welfare and safety. These requirements include building construction codes for fire and earthquake safety, energy conservation codes, green building codes and zoning codes. A building inspector or special inspector will perform inspections to help verify that construction is consistent with the plans and minimum standards for construction.

Construction is a substantial financial investment which can be seriously jeopardized by non-complying construction. Work done without required permits is not only illegal, but will likely create problems when you try to sell your property due to real estate disclosure laws. Fire and homeowners' insurance policies may invalidate coverage for work performed without proper permits.

When am I exempt from obtaining a permit?

Pursuant to Sonoma Municipal Code Sections 14.10.010 and 14.20.025.A, a construction permit is not required for the following work. **However, all work, regardless of whether or not a permit is issued, must comply with the requirements of the California Code of Regulations and the Sonoma Municipal Code.** Permits are NOT required for:

EMERGENCY REPAIRS EXEMPTION:

- Where equipment replacements and repairs must be performed in an emergency situation, a permit application shall be submitted to the building official within the next working business day following the emergency repair.

BUILDING PERMIT EXEMPTIONS:

- One-story detached accessory structures used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses, trellises, arbors, gazebos, shade structures for other than motor vehicles, and similar uses, when located on a parcel which contains an existing Group R, and/or Group U Occupancy, provided that the building complies with zoning setback requirements and the floor area does not exceed 120 square feet and the total height does not exceed 9 feet and the structure contains no plumbing facilities, electrical circuits or heating appliances. No more than one structure may be allowed under this exemption unless separated from another permit-exempt structure by 10 feet or more.
- Fences constructed of other than stone, masonry or concrete, not over 7 feet in total height. Fences constructed of stone, masonry or concrete, not over 6 feet in total height.
- Retaining walls that are not over 4 feet in height measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall and retaining not more than 3 feet of material, unless supporting a surcharge or impounding Class I, II or IIIA liquids.
- Water tanks supported directly upon grade if the capacity does not exceed 5,000 gallons and the ratio of height to diameter or width does not exceed 2 to 1.
- Sidewalks and driveways not more than 30 inches above adjacent grade, and not over any basement or story below and not part of an accessible route.
- Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, countertops and similar finish work not otherwise subject to the accessibility requirements contained in Chapters 11A or 11B of the California Building Code.
- Temporary motion picture, television and theater stage sets and scenery.
- Prefabricated swimming pools accessory to a Group R-3 occupancy that are less than 18 inches deep, do not exceed 5,000 gallons, and are installed entirely above ground.
- Shade cloth structures constructed for nursery or agricultural purposes, located within an Agriculture zoning district.
- Swings and other playground equipment with a projected area less than 120 square feet and are accessory to detached one- and two-family dwellings.
- Window awnings of one- & two – family dwelling, Groups R-3 and U occupancies supported by an exterior wall which do not project more than 54 inches from the exterior wall and do not require additional support.
- Recovering of awnings on previously approved existing framework.
- Decks subject to the requirements of the California Residential Code (one & two-family dwellings) not exceeding 200 square feet in area, that are not more than 30 inches above grade at any point, are not attached to a building and do not serve a required exit door or an accessible route.
- Installation of cabinets or casework not provided with plumbing, electrical or mechanical work and not required to be accessible to the disabled.
- Non-fixed and movable fixtures, cases, racks, counters and partitions not over 5 feet 9 inches in height and work not otherwise subject to accessibility requirements.
- A tree house that does not exceed 64 square feet in floor area and 8 feet in total height measured from the top of the floor to highest point on the roof and does not exceed a total height of 15 feet measured from grade plane to the top of the treehouse floor or highest point on the roof whichever is higher.
- Flagpoles not erected upon a building and not more than 15 feet in height above grade plane.
- In-kind-repair or replacement of less than 32 square feet of drywall, siding, stucco or roofing within any 12-month period.

ELECTRICAL PERMIT EXEMPTIONS:

- Listed cord-and-plug connected temporary decorative lighting.
- Reinstallation of attachment plug receptacles, but not the outlets therefore.
- Replacement of branch circuit overcurrent devices of the required capacity in the same location.
- Electrical wiring, devices, appliances, apparatus or equipment operating at less than 25 volts and not capable of supplying more than 50 watts of energy.
- Minor repair work, including installation or replacement of equipment such as lamps and of electric utilization equipment approved for connection to suitable permanently-installed receptacles.
- Electrical equipment used for radio and television transmissions, but do apply to equipment and wiring for a power supply and the installations of towers and antennas.
- Installation of any temporary system required for the testing or servicing of electrical equipment or apparatus or the process of manufacturing, testing, servicing, or repairing electrical equipment or apparatus.
- Replacement of flush or snap switches, fuses, lamp sockets, receptacles, contactor or control device and other minor maintenance and repair work, such as replacing worn cords and tightening connections on a wiring device.
- Portable motors or other portable appliances energized by means of a cord or cable having an attachment plug end to be connected to an approved receptacle when that cord or cable is permitted by the Electrical Code.
- Repair or replacement of electrodes or transformers of the same size and capacity for signs or gas tube systems.
- Installation, alteration or repair of electrical wiring, apparatus or equipment or the generation, transmission, distribution or metering of electrical energy or in the operation of signals or the transmission of intelligence by a public or private utility in the exercise of its function as a serving utility.

MECHANICAL PERMIT EXEMPTIONS:

- A portable heating appliance, portable ventilating equipment, a portable cooling unit, or a portable evaporative cooler.
- A closed system of steam, hot, or chilled water piping within heating or cooling equipment regulated by the code.
- Replacement of any component part or assembly of an appliance that does not alter its original approval and complies with other applicable requirements of the code.
- Self-contained refrigeration systems containing 10 pounds or less of refrigerant or that are actuated by motors of 1 horsepower (746 W) or less and refrigerating equipment that is part of the equipment for which a permit has been issued pursuant to the requirements of this code.
- A plug-and-cord connected unit refrigeration system.
- Portable plug-and-cord connected cooking or clothes-drying appliances.
- Portable plug-and-cord connected ventilation or cooling equipment.
- Portable plug-and-cord connected evaporative cooler.
- Portable fuel-cell appliances that are not connected to a fixed piping system and are not interconnected to a power grid.

PLUMBING PERMIT EXEMPTIONS:

- The stopping of leaks in drains, soil, waste or vent pipes, provided, however, that should any concealed trap, drain pipe, soil, waste or vent pipe become defective and it becomes necessary to remove and replace the same with new material, the same shall be considered as new work and a permit shall be procured and inspection made.
- The clearing of stoppages or the repairing of leaks in pipes, valves or fixtures, nor for the removal and reinstallation of water closets, provided such repairs do not involve or require the replacement or rearrangement of valves, pipes or fixtures.
- Exterior rainwater catchment systems used for outdoor non-spray irrigation with a maximum storage capacity of 5,000 gallons where the tank is supported directly upon grade and the ratio of height to diameter or width does not exceed 2 to 1 and does not require electrical power or a makeup water supply connection.
- Exterior rainwater catchment systems used for spray irrigation with a maximum storage capacity of 360 gallons.

GRADING PERMIT EXEMPTIONS:

- Excavations below finished grade for basements and footings of a building, retaining wall, swimming pool, or other structure authorized by a valid building permit. This subsection shall not exempt from permit requirements any excavation having an unsupported height greater than five feet after the completion of such structure.
- Cemetery graves.
- Refuse disposal sites controlled by other regulations.
- Excavations for wells or underground storage tanks no greater than 10,000 gallons in size when work is being done under the authority of a valid county well permit or city building permit.
- Stockpiling of dirt, rock, sand, gravel, aggregate or clay of 50 cubic yards or less for a period of 60 days or less, provided that the stockpile does not obstruct a drainage course or alter the drainage of neighboring properties.
- Excavation for utilities when performed by a public utility.
- Exploratory excavations of 50 cubic yards or less under the direction of a soils engineer or engineering geologist.
- An excavation of 50 cubic yards or less which is:
 - Less than two feet in depth at any given point; and
 - Does not create a cut slope greater than five feet in height and steeper than two horizontal to one vertical; and
 - Is outside of the special flood hazard area and does not obstruct a drainage course or alter the drainage of neighboring properties.
- French drains and shallow drywells (less than 3 feet deep and less than 3 feet in diameter).

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the City of Sonoma Building Department at 707-938-3681 if you have any question regarding building permits or when they are required.

