

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Building Permit Application Process

Do I need a grubbing or grading permit for clearing my lot?

Check with the Engineering Division of the Department of Public Works. The phone number for the East Hawaii Engineering Division office is (808) 961-8327 and the West Hawaii office is (808) 327-3530.

Do permits for electrical, grading, driveways, gas, and plumbing cost extra in addition to the building permit fee? If so, how much does each of those permits cost?

Yes, there are fees involved for driveway, grading, grubbing, plumbing, gas, and electrical permits. Fees vary per project size and complexity. Often times electrical and plumbing contractors include the cost of a permit fee in their price quote so be sure to verify with your contractor if their price includes permit fees.

Do I need approval for a cesspool or septic system from the Department of Health?

Yes, you need approval for a cesspool or septic system from the Department of Health (DOH). Refer to the DOH for their requirements. Once a septic system has been approved, DOH will send an "Approval for Use" letter to the design engineer. It is engineer's responsibility to send a copy of the "Approval for Use" letter to the homeowner. The homeowner then gives a copy of the "Approval for Use" letter to the building inspector.

Do I need a permit if I am installing a fireplace in my existing house? Do I need a separate permit if I am installing a fire place and chimney in a new house?

Yes, you must get a building permit if you are installing a wood burning stove, fireplace, or gas heater in an existing home.

If you are installing a fireplace and chimney in a new house, it will be included in the building permit since they need to be drawn on the building plans. If you did not include the fireplace, wood burning stove, or gas heater on your original building permit application, then a separate permit would be required complete with drawings.

I'm hosting a private wedding in my backyard; do I need a building permit for the tents?

Temporary tents or canopies used for private family parties, such as weddings, on your own property need approval and a temporary permit, valid for 30 days from the Building Division.

How long is my building permit good for?

Per the Uniform Building Code, a permit expires and becomes null and void when the work authorized does not begin within 120 days from the date of issuance or when work authorized is suspended or abandoned at any time after work has begun for a period of 120 days. Check with your area building inspector to see if your permit is still valid.

If I am replacing an existing wall within my house that's termite infested, do I still need a permit?

If the repair involves only the replacement of component parts or existing work with similar materials for the purpose of maintenance, does not cost more than \$1,000 (labor and materials) in a 12-month period, and does not affect any electrical or mechanical installations it does not require a building permit.

I didn't realize I needed a building permit to enclose my carport and already finished the project. Do I still need a permit even though I finished the project?

Yes, you still need to get a building permit even if you have already built a house or remodeled an existing structure.

What happens if I don't get a building permit?

You may experience more difficulty selling your home if it's unpermitted. If you're reported as having an unpermitted building or doing unpermitted work, you may be cited by the Building Division. The first citation is a Notice of Violation and a Stop Work Order. The second citation is a Notice of Order and usually there's an immediate fine ranging from \$50 - \$1,000. If you don't comply within the deadline set in the Notice of Order you will be assessed daily fines ranging from \$50 - \$1,000 a day. At each step there's an appeal process.

Questions often arise from appraisers and realtors as to whether a house is permitted or unpermitted during the home buying/selling process or during home evaluations for a home equity loan.

Also, insurance companies often require a structure to be permitted before issuing an insurance policy. An unpermitted house may affect your ability to get homeowners insurance.