



## Community Development

21630 11th Avenue South, Suite D  
Des Moines, WA 98198-6398  
Phone: (206) 870-7576  
www.desmoineswa.gov

PAM

## Building Division

### Q & A

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

We have had many good questions asked by homeowners, contractors, and building professionals and here are just a few. Please contact the Building Division at 206.870.7576 if you have a question not listed below.

### WHEN DO I NEED A BUILDING PERMIT?

If you are not sure, give the Building Division a call. Normally the following things **do not** require a building permit.

1. One story detached accessory buildings used as tool sheds, play houses, and similar uses, provided the floor area does not exceed 200 square feet.
2. Fences not over 7 feet high.
3. Non-fixed and moveable fixtures, cases, racks, counter, and partitions not over 5 feet 9 inches high.
4. Retaining walls and rockeries that are not over 4 feet in height measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, unless supporting a surcharge or impounding Class I, II, or III-A liquids.
5. Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, counter tops, and similar finish work.
6. Window awnings supported by an exterior wall of a single family residence or duplex and garages or sheds when projecting not more than 54 inches from the wall.
7. Prefabricated swimming pools, accessory to a single family dwelling, in which the pool walls are entirely above the adjacent grade and if the capacity does not exceed 5,000 gallons.

### DO I NEED A PERMIT TO BUILD OR PLACE A SHED IN MY BACK YARD?

Yes. If the shed is over 200 square feet of floor area. No, if it is less than 200 square feet of floor area. Be aware that you still have to meet property line setback regulations. Typically, property line setbacks are 20 feet in the front, 5 and 10 feet at the side and 20 feet at the rear of the property. Even if the shed is less than 200 square feet and you don't need a permit, you still have to build it to code.

### MAY I BUILD MY HOUSE OR ADDITION MYSELF?

Yes! If you are remodeling or making improvements to your property that you wish to rent out; or if you intend to build a house for yourself to live in for at least two years you do not have to be a registered contractor.

If you act as an owner/contractor and hire out any portion of the work to others for work on a home that is your primary residence for at least two years, you do not have to be a registered contractor but anyone that you hire to do any part of the work must be a registered general or specialty contractor. All contractors need to obtain a City of Des Moines business license before doing any work.

If you are hiring a contractor(s) to assist you with your project that is either new or is one that involves an existing parcel that you intend to sell, or if you purchase a property to fix up yourself and sell (flipping), then you need to be a registered, licensed contractor.

Be aware, even if you do not need a permit, you will need to meet City of Des Moines Municipal Code zoning requirements for the area in which you live. Prior to any construction or placement of structures on the property, please contact our Community Development Department at 206.870.7576, or drop by to speak with a Planner during open counter hours of 9:00 to 11:00 am.

### MAY I DRAW MY OWN PLANS OR DO I NEED AN ARCHITECT?

If you know how to draw to scale and you know something about construction, you may do this work yourself. Be aware, it may be difficult if you do not understand what you are trying to draw, or do not know what is required to be on a drawing. You can get assistance from contractors, drafters, designers, and architects.

### I AM PLANNING TO BUILD A DECK ON MY PROPERTY. IS A PERMIT REQUIRED?

Yes. The code requires a permit for all decks and the deck must meet certain design requirements.

### WE ARE PAINTING THE EXTERIOR OF OUR HOUSE. IS A PERMIT REQUIRED?

No. A permit is not required for cosmetic improvements such as painting, carpets or other types of flooring materials. Be aware, this might not apply to commercial installation.



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### BUILDING:

#### WHERE CAN I FIND BUILDING CODE INFORMATION?

The Building Division will show you any part of the code that interests you. Also, most construction codes are available at your local library and you can purchase most code books at a college bookstore or online at <https://www.wabobookstore.org>. You may also go online to view the codes at <http://www.iccsafe.org> or <http://publicecodes.cyberregs.com/icod/>. You can view the state amendment at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=si>

#### ARE THERE ANY EXAMPLES OF DETAILS OR PLANS THAT I COULD LOOK AT?

The Building Division has many construction details available as handouts for you to take with you. Staff members are available at the front counter to assist you with your project.

### ELECTRICAL:

#### I PLAN TO ADD SOME ELECTRICAL CIRCUITS TO MY EXISTING HOUSE WIRING. DO I NEED AN ELECTRICAL PERMIT?

Yes. If you are the owner of the property, you are allowed to do your own electrical work under state law. Electrical contractors must obtain their own permits for the work that they are performing as they can not work under a permit issued to an owner. Be aware, most electrical work requires a permit. The exception is "like in kind" replacement of plugs, switches, and light fixtures.

### MECHANICAL:

#### MY FURNACE FAILED AND SINCE IT WAS SATURDAY, I BOUGHT A NEW ONE EXACTLY LIKE THE OLD ONE AND INSTALLED IT MYSELF. THE WEATHER WAS COLD AND MY FAMILY NEEDED HEAT. AM I GOING TO BE FINED FOR INSTALLING THE FURNACE WITHOUT A PERMIT?

No. Emergency repairs or replacements can be done immediately. Be aware, if a permit would normally be required, then you should obtain the permit on the next business day after the repair or replacement is accomplished to confirm by inspection that the installation meets applicable codes.

### PLUMBING:

#### I BOUGHT A NEW WATER HEATER AT A LOCAL HARDWARE STORE. IS INSTALLING A WATER HEATER CONSIDERED TO BE A MINOR REPAIR?

No! It is a replacement and requires a permit for installation.

#### THE TRAP ON MY RESIDENTIAL KITCHEN SINK IS LEAKING. DO I NEED A PERMIT TO REPAIR OR REPLACE IT?

No. A permit is not required. This is considered general maintenance repair.

#### I AM INSTALLING A NEW RESIDENTIAL TOILET IN MY BATHROOM. DO I NEED A PERMIT?

No. A permit is not required for the removal and replacement of an existing toilet.

#### DO I NEED A PERMIT TO INSTALL A NEW SINK IN MY RESIDENTIAL KITCHEN?

No. A permit is not required, if you are replacing your sink with a new one and it does not involve relocation or alteration of the plumbing pipes. Alteration to the plumbing piping system requires a plumbing permit.

#### DO I NEED A PERMIT TO RELOCATE PLUMBING FIXTURES FROM ONE AREA TO ANOTHER?

Yes. You do need a permit to relocate plumbing fixtures (sinks, toilets, tubs, washers, etc.)