



BULLETIN #140: WORK EXEMPT FROM PERMITS

PURPOSE

This bulletin identifies common work that may be exempt from a building, electrical, gas, mechanical, or plumbing permit. It is intended to help property owners, design professionals, and contractors determine when a permit may not be required and when additional review is necessary.

BACKGROUND

The California Building Code generally requires permits for construction, alteration, repair, demolition, changes in occupancy, and regulated electrical, gas, mechanical, or plumbing work. CBC Section 105.2 provides limited exemptions for minor work. A permit exemption does not authorize work that violates applicable building codes, zoning regulations, fire or accessibility requirements, easements, utility requirements, or other laws or ordinances.

1. GENERAL CONDITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

1.1 Permit exemptions apply only to the specific work described in this bulletin. Any associated electrical, plumbing, mechanical, gas, solar, energy-storage, grading, demolition, public right-of-way, or other nonexempt work requires the applicable separate permit.

1.2 Permit-exempt work must still comply with all applicable construction, zoning, fire, accessibility, energy, floodplain, grading, easement, utility, and other regulatory requirements.

1.3 A permit is required when the work affects structural elements, fire-resistance-rated construction, required exits, accessible routes, means of egress, hazardous materials, or the approved use or occupancy of a building.

2. BUILDING WORK EXEMPT FROM PERMIT

2.1 One-story detached accessory structures used as tool or storage sheds, playhouses, and similar uses, when the floor area does not exceed 120 square feet.

2.2 Fences not over 7 feet high, except swimming-pool or spa barriers.

2.3 Retaining walls 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 IIIA liquids.

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2.4 Water tanks supported directly on grade when capacity does not exceed 5,000 gallons and the height-to-diameter or height-to-width ratio does not exceed 2:1.

2.5 Sidewalks and driveways not more than 30 inches above adjacent grade, not located over a basement or story below, and not part of an accessible route.

2.6 Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, countertops, and similar finish work.

2.7 Temporary motion-picture, television, and theater stage sets and scenery.

2.8 Prefabricated swimming pools accessory to a Group R-3 occupancy that are less than 24 inches deep, do not exceed 5,000 gallons, and are installed entirely above ground.

2.9 Shade-cloth structures constructed for nursery or agricultural purposes, excluding associated service systems.

2.10 Swings and other playground equipment accessory to detached one- and two-family dwellings.

2.11 Window awnings in Group R-3 and U occupancies that are supported by an exterior wall, project no more than 54 inches, and do not require additional support.

2.12 Nonfixed and movable fixtures, cases, racks, counters, and partitions not over 5 feet 9 inches high.

2.13 Oil derricks.

3. ELECTRICAL WORK EXEMPT FROM PERMIT

3.1 Minor repair and maintenance work, including replacement of lamps and connection of approved portable electrical equipment to approved permanently installed receptacles.

3.2 Electrical equipment used for radio and television transmissions. This exemption does not include power-supply equipment and wiring or the installation of towers and antennas.

3.3 Temporary systems installed solely for testing or servicing electrical equipment or apparatus.

4. GAS WORK EXEMPT FROM PERMIT

4.1 Portable heating appliances.

4.2 Replacement of a minor part that does not alter the approval of the equipment or make the equipment unsafe.

5. MECHANICAL WORK EXEMPT FROM PERMIT

- 5.1** Portable heating appliances, portable ventilation equipment, and portable cooling units.
- 5.2** Steam, hot-water, or chilled-water piping located within heating or cooling equipment regulated by the code.
- 5.3** Replacement of a part that does not alter the equipment approval or make the equipment unsafe.
- 5.4** Portable evaporative coolers.
- 5.5** Self-contained refrigeration systems containing 10 pounds or less of refrigerant and driven by motors of 1 horsepower or less.

6. PLUMBING WORK EXEMPT FROM PERMIT

- 6.1** Stopping leaks in drains, water, soil, waste, or vent piping. When concealed piping or traps are defective and must be removed and replaced with new material, the work is considered new work and requires a permit and inspection.
- 6.2** Clearing stoppages or repairing leaks in pipes, valves, or fixtures, and removing and reinstalling water closets, when the repair does not require replacement or rearrangement of valves, pipes, or fixtures.

7. EMERGENCY REPAIRS

- 7.1** When equipment replacement or repair must be performed immediately because of an emergency, the necessary work may proceed to address the emergency condition. A permit application must be submitted to the Building Official by the next working business day.

8. PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES

- 8.1** A permit is not required for installation, alteration, or repair of generation, transmission, distribution, metering, or related equipment that is owned and controlled by a public service agency through an established right