

What You Should Know: Illegal Construction in Your Neighborhood

What is illegal construction?

Any construction done without required building permits is illegal construction. Illegal construction is a public danger; it can hurt people and property.

What Work Requires a Permit?

These types of work require **building permits**:

- Additions
- Demolition
- New construction
- Retaining walls, decks, fences, sheds, garages, and vaults
- Signs and awnings

You need a **public space permit** for:

- Dumpsters in public space
- Flag poles, planter boxes, retaining walls, and fences in public space
- Sidewalk construction and repair

You need a **raze permit** for building and structure demolition. To raze structures larger than 500 square feet, you must also have a certificate of insurance for \$500,000 in coverage.

Work that requires **water or sewer excavation permits** includes:

- Connections to water and sewer mains in the street
- Excavation for water meters and vaults in public space
- Water or sewer pipe installation

You need **supplemental systems installation permits** for:

- Air conditioning installation
- Electrical installation
- Gas appliance installation
- Plumbing fixture installation
- Refrigeration system installation

Only licensed DC contractors may apply for excavation and supplemental permits. There's a fee for each permit and another fee for any work in public space.

For fact sheets with more permit application information, go to dcra.dc.gov or visit our Permit Center, 941 North Capitol St NE-2nd Floor:

- 12 Steps to Drafting a Building Plat
- Building Permit Application Requirements by Permit Type
- Building Permit Reviews by Permit Type
- Homeowners Center FAQs
- Job Classification System (Permits)

Don't Work without permits

- Make sure any contractors or subcontractors get permits
- Only do work in the scope of your permit

Penalties

Your project will get a Stop Work Order (SOW) -- and a \$2,000 fine for each violation -- if you:

- Work without a permit
- Work outside the scope of a permit
- Work before 7 am or after 7 pm Monday-Saturday
- Work any time on Sunday

If you break the laws again, you may be fined \$4,000 for each violation.

You may also have to pay a fee of 50% of each permit you should have gotten. DCRA will not release the SOW until you resolve violation.

What Work Does NOT Require a Permit?

Unless you're in a historic district, you don't need permits for:

- Brick pointing
- Caulking, patching, and plaster repair
- Installation of cabinets and architectural millwork
- Installation of window screens and storm windows
- Repair of existing fences with like materials
- Retaining walls, 18 inches (0.46M) or less in height
- Construction of garden storage sheds that meet DC Official Code § 107.3.3 requirements
- Painting, if it is not with fire-retardant paint
- Replacement of:
 - non-rated windows and doors
 - roofing, coping, and siding
 - gutters and downspouts
 - private sidewalks, driveways, and patios
 - non-rated suspended ceiling tile
 - floor coverings
 - gypsum board, up to 160 square feet (9.3m)
 - storm drain piping, up to 50 linear feet (15.24m)
 - sanitary/drainage system piping, up to 10 linear feet
 - sanitary venting piping (3.05m), up to 20 linear feet
 - hydraulic system piping (6.10m), up to 50 linear feet
 - duct work (15.24m), in non-hazardous and commercial kitchen exhaust systems, up to 10 linear feet (3.05m)

If you find out that you're violating the DC Construction Code, stop work right away and get the right permits. If you have questions, call (202) 442-4589.

Report Illegal Construction

Call (202) 442-STOP (7867).

Give the address and describe the illegal construction.

DCRA will schedule an inspection to investigate.

