

# Building Department

## Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 05/24/13

### **Q: When is a building, plumbing, or mechanical permit required?**

A: When any owner or authorized agent 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, a permit is required.

However, the code identifies roughly a dozen permit exemptions including for normal minor repair. For specific exemptions from the permit process contact the Building Department at 253-517-2741. This department will attempt to provide clarification on the more common permit requirement questions.

### **Q: Do I need a permit to reroof in Milton?**

A: Yes. Water intrusion and moisture is the single most destructive factor to the structural integrity of a building. The permit process allows the inspector to inspect the structural soundness of the existing roof deck and structural members, correct causes of premature roof failure such as improper venting, and flashing. The inspection also provides reasonable assurance the roof will be installed to the most current code standards; thus, protecting existing housing stock.

### **Q: Do I need a permit to replace or construct a residential deck?**

A: Possibly. A permit is not required if the deck does not exceed 200 square feet in area, not more than 30 inches above grade at any point, is not attached to a dwelling, and does not serve a required exit door. Current code standards have very specific requirements for critical connections such as the attachment of guardrails, ledgers, and details to resist lateral displacement.

Because of the risk associated with elevated exterior decks, Building codes warrant additional oversight when decks exceed 30 or more inches above grade. Deck construction appears simple and straightforward and as a result, it is often a “do-it-yourself (DIY)” project. Decks exposed to wet Western Washington elements, constructed without redundancy in critical connections,

and often a non-engineered DIY design make elevated decks an elevated risk to the occupants. Deck failure occurs 90% of the time from the ledger separating from the main structure. Deck failures are often catastrophic and without warning. ***Note: Regularly inspect your existing deck and guardrails. This department highly encourages repairs and strengthening of existing decks to reduce injury!***

**Q: Do I need a permit to replace a water heater? Does my water heater need an expansion tank?**

A: Yes. A permit is required for a water heater. A water heater has specific installation requirements that must be verified to assure a reasonable level of safety for the occupants and to reduce damage to the structure. Concerns include, but are not limited to: carbon monoxide as a result of insufficient combustion air or negative pressure from other mechanical systems, temperature and pressure relief, seismic displacement, and protection of the structure from water damage.

A: Yes. A properly sized expansion tank is required for a tank type water heater. The water distribution system includes check and pressure reducing valves that cause the water heater to be part of a “closed system”. As a result, internal pressures of the water tank can be dangerously high as the water is heated. The T&P valve is not designed to maintain a safe consistent pressure.

**Q: Do I need a permit to build a detached residential shed?**

A: One-story detached accessory structures used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses, provided the floor area does not exceed 200 square feet, are exempt from the permit process. Exempt from the permit process does not exempt the project from the code. All setback, zoning and building codes apply.

**Q: Do I need a permit to build a residential fence?**

A: No, but the fence must comply with all Milton Municipal Codes. Maximum fence height must not exceed six feet above average grade, and the maximum height within the front yard setback must not exceed forty-two inches. Additional requirements exist to address swimming pools, vehicle vision safety and other concerns.

**Q: How do I get a building, plumbing, or mechanical permit?**

A: Permit applications are on the City of Milton website. Go to “Forms and Documents”, scroll down to Building Division, under Planning and Community Development, and click “New Building Application”. While the form specifies Building Application, it is really a **Master Application** and the same one used for plumbing and mechanical. Another option is to stop by the Building Department during regular business hours and pick up an application.

*Note: This department has limited staff and staff is often in the field, or immersed in current obligations. If you have permit questions, this department recommends you schedule time with the Building Official in advance to discuss your proposal.*

**Q: How much does a permit cost?**

A: Fees are based on the City’s most recent Fee Schedule. For a residential reroof, furnace or water heater replacement, the permit cost is approximately \$153.50 - \$166.00. This cost includes all required inspections and updates to property file records. Larger projects cost more to reflect the additional review and inspection time required to assure compliance to the most current codes and standards.

**Q: How long is the permit good for once issued?**

A: The permit is good for 180 days from the date of issuance or last inspection. Don’t forget to schedule all required inspections including the final.

**Q: Where do I get an electrical permit?**

A: Electrical permits and electrical inspections within Milton are performed by Tacoma Public Utilities. Tacoma Power is located at 3628 South 35<sup>th</sup> Street Tacoma, Washington 98409 and can be contacted at 253-503-8277, or on the web at: [www.tacomapower.com](http://www.tacomapower.com).