

I don't really need a permit for that, do I?

While it may seem like you can't even blow your nose without first getting a city permit, in fact not everything requires one.

If you want to build a storage shed in your back yard you don't need a permit if its footprint is less than 120 square feet.

Concrete patios don't require a permit (but wooden decks do). Neither do fences in a single-family zone – as long as you're outside the Historic District – or security systems for your home or business.

Most interior work won't require a permit. This includes painting, flooring and cabinetry. However, if your project involves mechanical or electrical work, new or relocated plumbing fixtures, building a wall or cutting an opening for a door or window, then a permit is required.

Just because your project doesn't require a permit does not mean anything goes.

For instance, even though that small storage shed doesn't require a permit, it still must be set back from the rear and side property lines by at least five feet. The fence you build to keep Rover in the yard is limited to 4-6 feet in height depending on where it's located. And if your concrete patio is more than 2,000 square feet you may trigger stormwater requirements.

It is true, though, that most construction activity needs a permit. We require permits in order to protect the public health and welfare by making sure the new construction is safe and meets code requirements. Construction that meets code requirements also helps to protect property values.

The best rule to follow is simply to ask first before starting your project. It is much easier to start your project on the right foot than to find out you need a permit after you have started. If you start a project without a permit when one is required you will have to stop all work until an application can be reviewed and a permit is issued. Also, the penalty for building without a permit is a doubling of the cost of the permit.

Permits are not a money-making operation for the City. In fact, by law they can't be and the reality is Snohomish's permit fees do not cover all of the costs associated with issuing a permit.

If you are considering a construction project make one of your first tasks contacting Permit Coordinator Katie Hoole to find out if a permit is required. The best way to reach Katie is via email at hoole@snohomishwa.gov.