

Work Exempt from Permit

A quick guide to common work that may not require a building permit in Kern County.

IMPORTANT

Permit exemptions do not authorize work that violates building, zoning, floodplain, fire, WUI, or any other applicable law or ordinance.

Start Here

- Use the Residential section for one- and two-family dwellings, townhouses, and their accessory structures.
- Use the Commercial section for all other buildings and structures.
- Read every limit carefully. Exceeding a size, height, depth, attachment, use, or location limit may require a permit.

Other Approvals May Still Be Required

Department	Contact information
Zoning	661-862-8600 Zoning@KernCounty.com
Fire	661-391-3310
Floodplain Management	Brian Blase: 661-862-5098 Ravidu Wijesekare: 661-862-8937
Encroachment (Roads)	661-862-8827 Permit@KernCounty.com
Environmental Health	661-862-8740 EHBIDPermits@kerncounty.com

Before You Begin

- Confirm all applicable approvals before work starts.
- Contact Kern County Public Works when the proposed work is unclear or falls outside the listed limits.

Residential Work Exempt from Permit

2025 CRC R105.2 & 2025 KCBCR 17.06.051

NO PERMIT REQUIRED DOES NOT MEAN NO RULES APPLY

Confirm zoning, fire, floodplain, WUI, encroachment, environmental health, and all other applicable agency requirements are met before work starts.

Building

- Other than storm shelters, one-story detached accessory structures with a floor area not exceeding 120 square feet. These structures may still be regulated by the California Wildland-Urban Interface Code.
- Fences not over 7 feet high. Planning and Natural Resources may require a variance for fences over 6 feet high.
- Retaining walls not over 4 feet high, measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, unless an exception applies.
- Water tanks supported directly on grade with a capacity not exceeding 5,000 gallons and a height-to-diameter or height-to-width ratio not exceeding 2:1.
- Sidewalks and driveways.
- Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, countertops, and similar finish work.
- Prefabricated swimming pools less than 24 inches deep.
- Swings and other playground equipment.
- Window awnings supported by an exterior wall that project no more than 54 inches and require no additional support.
- Decks not exceeding 200 square feet, not more than 30 inches above grade at any point, not attached to a dwelling or townhouse, and not serving the required exit door.

RETAINING WALL SCREENING

Review is required when the wall supports a surcharge, impounds Class I, II, or III-A liquids, or retains soil within a 2:1 horizontal-to-vertical slope of the lowest finished grade at the property line. Where the 2:1 condition applies, use 6-inch minimum nominal masonry or concrete unless protected by another permitted or exempt retaining wall. Other materials require Building Official approval.

Residential Exempt Work

Electrical, gas, mechanical, and plumbing

NO PERMIT REQUIRED DOES NOT MEAN NO RULES APPLY

Confirm zoning, fire, floodplain, WUI, encroachment, environmental health, and all other applicable agency requirements are met before work starts.

Electrical

- Listed cord-and-plug-connected temporary decorative lighting.
- Reinstallation of attachment-plug receptacles, but not the outlets for them.
- Replacement of branch-circuit overcurrent devices of the required capacity in the same location.
- Electrical wiring, devices, appliances, apparatus, or equipment operating at less than 25 volts and not capable of supplying more than 50 watts of energy.
- Minor repair work, including replacement of lamps or connection of approved portable electrical equipment to approved permanently installed receptacles.

Gas

- Portable heating, cooking, or clothes-drying appliances.
- Replacement of a minor part that does not alter equipment approval or make the equipment unsafe.
- Portable fuel-cell appliances not connected to fixed piping and not interconnected to a power grid.

Mechanical

- Portable heating, ventilation, or cooling appliances.
- Steam, hot-water, or chilled-water piping within heating or cooling equipment regulated by the code.
- Replacement of a minor part that does not alter equipment approval or make the equipment unsafe.
- Portable evaporative coolers.
- Self-contained refrigeration systems containing 10 pounds or less of refrigerant and actuated by motors of 1 horsepower or less.
- Portable fuel-cell appliances not connected to fixed piping and not interconnected to a power grid.

Plumbing

- Stopping leaks in drains, water, soil, waste, or vent piping. Replacement of defective concealed piping is new work and requires a permit.
- Clearing stoppages, repairing leaks in pipes, valves, or fixtures, and removing and reinstalling water closets, provided valves, pipes, or fixtures are not replaced or rearranged.

K:\BuildingDev\Building Inspection\FORMS\2025\1 - FINAL\4-Forms\1-Building\15 - Work Exempt from Permit\Work Exempt From Permit.docx



Public Works

Joshua Champlin, P.E.
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS



K:\BuildingDev\Building Inspection\FORMS\2025\1 - FINAL\4-Forms\1-Building\15 - Work Exempt from Permit\Work Exempt From Permit.docx



2700 M Street, #400, Bakersfield, CA. 93301 | 661.862.5100 | www.KernPublicWorks.com

Residential Special Provisions

Emergency repairs, ordinary repairs, and public service agencies

NO PERMIT REQUIRED DOES NOT MEAN NO RULES APPLY

Confirm zoning, fire, floodplain, WUI, encroachment, environmental health, and all other applicable agency requirements are met before work starts.

R105.2.1 — Emergency Repairs

- When equipment replacement or repair must be performed in an emergency, submit the permit application to the Building Official no later than the next working business day.

R105.2.2 — Repairs

- An application or notice is not required for ordinary repairs to structures, replacement of lamps, or connection of approved portable electrical equipment to approved permanently installed receptacles.
- Ordinary repairs do not include cutting walls or partitions; removing or cutting structural beams or load-bearing supports; changing required egress; rearranging parts that affect egress; relocating or replacing plumbing, gas, drainage, electrical, or mechanical systems; or other work affecting public health or general safety.

R105.2.3 — Public Service Agencies

- A permit is not required for installation, alteration, or repair of generation, transmission, distribution, metering, or related equipment under the ownership and control of a public service agency by established right.

WHEN IN DOUBT

Contact Kern County Public Works before beginning work. A permit exemption does not waive zoning, fire, floodplain, WUI, encroachment, utility, or other agency requirements.

Commercial Exempt Work

2025 CBC105.2 & 2025 KCBCR 17.08.060

NO PERMIT REQUIRED DOES NOT MEAN NO RULES APPLY

Confirm zoning, fire, floodplain, WUI, encroachment, environmental health, and all other applicable agency requirements are met before work starts.

Building

- One-story detached accessory structures used as tool and storage sheds, playhouses, and similar uses, provided the floor area does not exceed 120 square feet. WUI requirements may still apply.
- Fences, other than swimming-pool barriers, not over 7 feet high. Planning and Natural Resources may require a variance for fences over 6 feet high.
- Retaining walls not over 4 feet high, measured from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall, unless an exception applies.
- Water tanks supported directly on grade with a capacity not greater than 5,000 gallons and a height-to-diameter or height-to-width ratio not greater than 2:1.
- Sidewalks and driveways not more than 30 inches above adjacent grade, not over a basement or story below, and not part of an accessible route.
- Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, countertops, and similar finish work.
- Temporary motion-picture, television, and theater stage sets and scenery.
- Prefabricated swimming pools accessory to a Group R-3 occupancy that are less than 24 inches deep, not greater than 5,000 gallons, and installed entirely above ground.
- Shade-cloth structures constructed for nursery or agricultural purposes, excluding service systems.
- Swings and other playground equipment accessory to detached one- and two-family dwellings.
- Window awnings in Group R-3 and U occupancies, supported by an exterior wall, projecting no more than 54 inches and requiring no additional support.
- Nonfixed and movable fixtures, cases, racks, counters, and partitions not over 5 feet 9 inches high.

Commercial Exempt Work

Oilfield activities and trade-specific exemptions

NO PERMIT REQUIRED DOES NOT MEAN NO RULES APPLY

Confirm zoning, fire, floodplain, WUI, encroachment, environmental health, and all other applicable agency requirements are met before work starts.

Accepted Oilfield Activities

- API/AWWA tanks on grade with qualifying foundations.
- API/ASME/ANSI processing equipment and pressure vessels on grade.
- Skid- or flange-mounted miscellaneous equipment.
- Flatwork or non-supporting slabs.
- Qualifying unattended accessory buildings not exceeding 120 square feet.
- Oil derricks and artificial-lift equipment.
- Pipe racks not over 8 feet high.
- Process piping.
- Oilfield containment walls not over 4 feet high.

OILFIELD EXEMPTION DOES NOT COVER

New or modified office buildings; buildings intended for human occupancy; HVAC replacements; or electrical or mechanical alterations or replacements subject to California Energy Efficiency Standards. Other agency clearances may still be required.

Commercial Exempt Work

Electrical, gas, mechanical, and plumbing

NO PERMIT REQUIRED DOES NOT MEAN NO RULES APPLY

Confirm zoning, fire, floodplain, WUI, encroachment, environmental health, and all other applicable agency requirements are met before work starts.

Electrical

- Minor repair and maintenance work, including replacement of lamps or connection of approved portable equipment to approved permanently installed receptacles.
- Electrical equipment used for radio and television transmissions. Power-supply wiring and tower or antenna installations are not exempt.
- Temporary systems required for testing or servicing electrical equipment or apparatus.

Gas

- Portable heating appliance.
- Replacement of any minor part that does not alter approval of equipment or make such equipment unsafe.

Mechanical

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

Plumbing

- Stopping leaks in drains, water, soil, waste, or vent piping. Replacement of defective concealed piping is new work and requires a permit.
- Clearing stoppages, repairing leaks in pipes, valves, or fixtures, and removing and reinstalling water closets, provided valves, pipes, or fixtures are not replaced or rearranged.

Commercial Special Provisions

Emergency repairs and public service agencies

NO PERMIT REQUIRED DOES NOT MEAN NO RULES APPLY

Confirm zoning, fire, floodplain, WUI, encroachment, environmental health, and all other applicable agency requirements are met before work starts.

105.2.1 — Emergency Repairs

- When equipment replacement or repair must be performed in an emergency, submit the permit application to the Building Official no later than the next working business day.

105.2.2 — Public Service Agencies

- A permit is not required for installation, alteration, or repair of generation, transmission, distribution, metering, or related equipment under the ownership and control of a public service agency by established right.

FINAL CHECK BEFORE WORK STARTS

Confirm whether the project requires zoning, fire, floodplain, WUI, encroachment, environmental health, utility, or other agency approval. Contact Kern County Public Works when the scope is not clearly listed.