When Do I Need a Permit for Home Improvements?

If you're like most of us, you're unsure whether or not a permit is needed for common repairs or desirable upgrades around the house. Here's a short list of repairs and upgrades that need a permit and another for work that doesn't require one. If in doubt, call the Building & Safety Division at (805) 388-5395 and speak to a member of our helpful staff.

What requires a permit?

- Changing out windows
- Replacing a furnace or air conditioner
- Solar panels
- Converting tub to shower or a shower to tub
- Above ground spa-electrical permit
- Upgrading electrical meters
- Replacing roof coverings
- Re-piping (either a portion or all of the house)
- Replacing plumbing fixtures: toilets, sinks, tubs, showers, water softeners
- Replacing wood siding or stucco
- Replacing a water heater

What does ***not*** require a permit?

- New or replacement cabinetry
- Countertops, tiling, carpeting, painting, backyard play equipment
- Fence 6' high or less (however, please check with Community Development)
- Window air-conditioners, as long as they plug into the wall
- Tool and storage sheds under 120 square feet (again, please check with Community Development)
- Retaining walls 3 feet high or less with a level backfill
- Sidewalks and concrete patios not more than 30 inches high

Please note that the following common upgrade items require a zone-clearance approval- a simple planning permit from the Department of Community Development- in addition to any building permit that may be required.

- Utility sheds 120 square feet or less (no fee applies)
- Room additions and balconies
- Front yard drought-tolerant landscape plans, front yard southwestern-theme landscape plans, and front yard synthetic/artificial grass (no fees apply)
- Patio covers, gazebos, trellis covers, arbors, and patio enclosures
- Pool, pool equipment, and equipment enclosures
- Tree houses and play houses
- Ground and roof-mounted solar panels

We hope these lists clear up your questions about permits for home improvement projects. If not, please call Building and Safety at (805) 388-5395.