PLUMBER PROS — GUIDE

When do you need a plumbing permit?

Check the address and the full scope with the local permit office before work starts.

Updated November 10, 2026

A permit question needs an address and a description of the work. Ask the office that serves that address. Do not use a rule from another city as an answer.

A concrete example: Portland residential work

Portland's residential plumbing permit page, checked 2026-11-10, lists work that needs a permit. Its examples include repairing, replacing or moving pipes, adding piping, replacing a water heater and installing or capping a sewer line. It also lists work that does not need a permit, such as fixing or maintaining existing plumbing fixtures or parts and replacing a toilet seat.

The distinction matters. Replacing a fixture and maintaining a part are not the same description. Explain exactly what will change. Ask the office to resolve any uncertain case. These are Portland residential examples, not a US or Canadian rule.

Send a clear question

Use a message like this:

The property address is __. **It is used as . The proposed work is . We plan to keep or change the fixture location as follows:** *__. Does this scope need a plumbing permit or another approval? Who may apply, and which inspections should the contractor arrange?*

Include the proposed water heater fuel type if relevant. Say whether any piping will move. For a business property, state the current use and the proposed use. Do not assume residential guidance covers a commercial job.

Separate related approvals

Portland's page says replacing a metal water line with a plastic line may also need electrical work related to grounding. Its sewer guide separates private-property work from work in the right of way. Use these as reasons to describe the full scope, not as rules for your own address.

Put responsibility in the contract

Ask who will apply, who will pay the stated fees and who will schedule inspection. Ask for the permit identifier and a copy of the final record. Do not accept a verbal claim that a permit is unnecessary when the office has not reviewed the actual scope.

For other jurisdictions

Find the city or regional building department from its official website. Ask it to direct you to the plumbing authority if another body issues the permit. Save the reply with your quote. In Canada, ask the same question at the municipality serving the property. This guide does not assert a province-wide exemption or requirement.

Sources

Checked 2026-11-10. These pages can change.

- City of Portland: Residential Plumbing Permits, accessed 2026-11-10.
- City of Portland: Broken Sewer and Drain Lines, accessed 2026-11-10.

Frequently asked questions

Does this guide decide the permit for my address?

No. It explains a checked Portland example and a process for asking your own permit office.