FREE HOMEOWNER GUIDE

What do I need for an electrical panel permit in Oregon?

Why panel work needs a permit

Whether you are adding a circuit, replacing a service panel, or upgrading to support a new appliance, most panel and service work in Oregon requires an electrical permit. A permit is not a rubber stamp. It is the mechanism that gets your electrical work inspected against the National Electrical Code and local Oregon standards, so a second set of qualified eyes confirms it is safe before it is buried in a wall or energized for years.

Beyond safety, a permit protects you in practical ways: it keeps the work up to code, helps preserve your homeowner's insurance coverage, and makes the home easier to sell later, since unpermitted electrical work is a common sticking point in inspections and appraisals. Whenever we handle a panel upgrade or similar work, we pull the permit and coordinate the inspection as part of the job.

1. Verify panel location and clearance (NEC 110.26)

Inspectors need safe working space around the panel, and this is one of the first things they check. The code calls for clear room in front of and around the equipment so an electrician can work on it without hazard.

- [ ] Depth: at least 36 inches (3 feet) of clear space in front of the panel
- [ ] Width: at least 30 inches, or the width of the panel, whichever is greater
- [ ] Height: at least 6.5 feet of clear headroom
- [ ] Keep the space free of plumbing, gas lines, shelving, and stored items

2. Identify your service type

Know what you have before you apply. The permit and the work both depend on how your home is fed and at what capacity, so identify these details up front.

- [ ] Overhead or underground service
- [ ] Service size: 100-amp, 150-amp, or 200-amp (larger for some homes)
- [ ] Single-phase (typical for homes) or three-phase (larger properties)

3. Confirm grounding and neutral arrangement

Grounding is central to preventing shock, and it is a standard inspection item. Depending on your home, the work may involve grounding electrodes such as ground rods or plates, a properly arranged neutral and ground at the main service, and a grounding connection to metal water piping where it applies. Getting the neutral and

ground arrangement right, connected at the main service, kept separate in any subpanel, is exactly the kind of detail an inspection is there to catch.

4. Include a load calculation

Inspectors want confidence that your panel can safely carry your home's demand. If you are adding circuits or large loads such as an EV charger, a hot tub, a kiln, or a heat pump, include an updated load calculation with the application. The same calculation tells you whether your existing service has room or whether an upgrade is part of the project, which is why it is worth doing early rather than discovering a capacity problem mid-job.

5. Apply, then prepare for inspection

Electrical permits are issued by your local city or county building department, and most can be applied for online. In this area that usually means the City of Portland Permitting & Development (formerly the Bureau of Development Services), Washington County Building Services, or the City of Beaverton, depending on where you live. Larger service upgrades also involve coordinating with your utility, PGE or Pacific Power, for a temporary shutoff.

One Oregon note worth understanding: homeowners can pull a permit for work on their own owner-occupied home, but panel and service work involves live equipment that stays energized even with the main breaker off, and a mistake can be fatal. For anything beyond the simplest tasks, having a licensed electrician do the work, and carry the permit, is the safer path. We handle the permit, scheduling, inspection prep, and utility coordination so the process stays smooth.

Frequently asked questions

Do I need a permit to replace or upgrade my electrical panel in Oregon?

Yes. Replacing a service panel, upgrading your service, or adding circuits requires an electrical permit and inspection through your local city or county building department. Replacing a single breaker in an existing panel generally does not. When a permit is needed, we pull it and coordinate the inspection as part of the job.

What clearance does an electrical panel need?

NEC 110.26 calls for at least 36 inches of clear depth in front of the panel, at least 30 inches of width (or the width of the equipment), and at least 6.5 feet of headroom. The space must be kept clear of plumbing, gas lines, and stored items so the panel can be worked on safely. Inspectors check this closely.

Can a homeowner pull their own electrical permit in Oregon?

Homeowners can pull a permit for work on their own owner-occupied home. But panel and service work involves equipment that stays energized even with the main breaker off, and a mistake can cause serious injury or death. For anything beyond the simplest tasks, have a licensed electrician do the work and carry the permit.

Where do I apply for an electrical permit in the Portland area?

Permits are issued by your local building department, typically the City of Portland Permitting & Development, Washington County Building Services, or the City of Beaverton, depending on where you live. Most

applications can be started online. We handle the permit and inspection process for the work we perform.

Sources

1. Residential Electrical Permits, City of Portland Permitting & Development. https://www.portland.gov/ppd/residential-permitting/residential-electrical-permits
2. Licensing clarification: Residential Property Owner Scope of Work (ORS 479.540), Oregon Building Codes Division. https://www.oregon.gov/bcd/licensing/Documents/Clarifications/el-clarification-res-property-owner.pdf
3. Electrical Code Program: Codes and standards, Oregon Building Codes Division. https://www.oregon.gov/bcd/codes-stand/Pages/electrical.aspx

> **Need a licensed electrician in the Portland area?**
> Call Smiley Electric at (503) 484-7556 (Mon–Sat, 7am–5pm) or visit smileyelectric.net/contact. For sparks, smoke, a burning smell or a hot panel, turn off the power if it is safe and call right away.

Reviewed by Joshua Smiley, owner & master electrician, Smiley Electric. Last reviewed November 13, 2026. Online version: smileyelectric.net/help/oregon-electrical-permit-checklist/. General information, not a substitute for an on-site inspection.

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