

Permit Process

California can readily accommodate expansion and location projects with properly-zoned, infrastructure-rich industrial and commercial sites. Many communities have also adopted state-of-the-art permit streamlining practices, which enable them to efficiently meet a company's project timeline. A number of counties have established Business Environmental Resource Centers that act as one-stop, non-regulatory offices set up to help businesses understand and comply with air quality, hazardous materials/waste, solid waste and water quality regulations. They act as neutral third-party mediators and their services are free and confidential. These communities will assign a project manager to personally guide an applicant through the permit process.

Overview of Permit Procedure

There are four elements generally required to initiate the permit process. The following is a summary of the steps that a project may follow to become fully permitted in California.

1. An adequate description of the proposed project.
2. A completed application form of usually less than four pages.
3. The appropriate filing fee as determined by the local, state, or federal permitting authority.
4. California law requires development projects to be reviewed for any potential effects on the environment. Impacts on air and water quality, traffic, housing, and land use are generally considered. If there is a significant effect on resources, then further documentation may be required.

The permit process starts at the local level in the planning department. Local permits called "land use" permits are generally required to ensure that a proposed project or business is located in the appropriate region of the city that has been identified for similar use.

These regions, called "zones," are identified in the city or county's general plan, and represent what the local government (on behalf of the citizens of that community) requires of the business to operate in a particular zone. Land use permits ensure that the proposed project use is consistent with the general plan and verify that the proposed project conforms to the overall plan for the local community.

When a proposed business first initiates the permitting process with the local authorities, it automatically begins an environmental review process. This is in the form of an "Initial Study," which checks whether or not the project may have an effect (for example, increased demand) on such factors as water supply (yes, no or maybe). Any "yes" and "maybe" impacts may need to be mitigated, depending on the local environmental and political climate. A significant number of "yes" answers may inspire the lead agency (which is in charge of coordinating all permits), to require an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

The Permit Streamlining Act places lead agencies on strict timelines in which to issue all necessary permits.

