

Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

Getting a Certificate of Occupancy

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This Tip is intended to provide an overview of how to get a certificate of occupancy for your building. Before most new buildings or structures can be used or occupied in Seattle, it must have a Certificate of Occupancy (C of O). This certificate indicates that the project complies with the regulations for occupancy and activity required by the Seattle Building Code (Section 109). You generally cannot get a change in occupancy classification until the building official has issued a C of O.

For remodel projects where the occupancy classification is not changing or for single-family or duplex (R-3 Occupancy), a C of O is not required. For mixed-use buildings (e.g., containing parking, offices, retail and residential uses), it must have a Cof O that indicates all these occupancies. Be aware that "use" for Land Use Code purposes is not the same thing as "occupancy" for the Building Code.

A C of O is typically for an entire building including the exterior and interior (called "shell and core"), and for all occupancies proposed within the building (e.g., offices and retail). However, assembly occupancies (e.g., theatres or restaurants) require separate certificates. Tenant improvements (simple interior remodels) do not require a C of O unless there is a change in occupancy per the Building Code.

Final Inspection Prerequisites

Prior to final inspection and issuance of a C of O, your project must meet the following requirements:

1. You must complete all **land use conditions** per your approved plan for your Master Use Permit (e.g., easements, design review conditions, installation of pedestrian walkways).
2. The Seattle Fire Marshall's office must approve

all **alarms, sprinkler systems, emergency power plants**, and other **safety systems** in your project. The Seattle Fire Department must approve a final inspection before the building inspector's approval of the final inspection. To request a fire department inspection, contact the Fire Marshall's Office at **(206) 386-1450**.

3. SDCI inspectors must approve all **mechanical systems** commissioning and completion requirements in your project.
4. You must have all work authorized by specialty permits (such as **electrical, plumbing, elevator, mechanical, boiler, and street use**) inspected and finalized. This includes **Seattle Public Utilities conditions** such as water supply provisions and back flow prevention, and Seattle Department of Transportation public contract work and street vacations.
5. All work conducted by special inspection agencies, including **smoke control and pressurization systems, soils, excavation, fireproofing, concrete, and steel**, must be completed and filed with at SDCI, including final letters from the agencies.
6. You must install all **required signage** (such as exit, maximum occupancy, maximum storage load, address, etc.).
7. You must file all required post-permit submittals with SDCI and pay the required fees.

Fees

For the most current fees, consult with SDCI Inspection Services staff at **(206) 684-8950** or visit our "Fees" page at [http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/fees](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/fees).

Final Inspection and Issuance

After you have all the necessary final approvals, you should call the SDCI Inspection Request Line at **(206) 684-8900** for a final inspection by the building inspector. If everything is in order and complies with your approved plans, we will approve and issue you C of O.



The C of O contains the following information:

- Building permit number
- Address
- Description of the space
- Statement that the space complies with applicable regulations
- Name of the building official

Temporary Certificates

In certain circumstances, the building official may issue a Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO) for use of a portion of a building before the entire building is completed, as long as all devices and safeguards for fire protection and life safety are maintained (DR 19-2017, <http://web6.seattle.gov/DPD/DirRulesViewer/Rule.aspx?id=19-2017>). The TCO allows a tenant to occupy space for a specific period of time, and has an expiration date. If your project is not complete and you have not obtained a permanent C of O, you must renew the TCO before the expiration date.

An example of how you may use a TCO is a high-rise building where the fire/life safety features are complete, but certain conditions such as landscaping may not yet be installed due to the season. Another example of when a TCO may be appropriate is when a building and all fire/life conditions are complete, but because street improvements are being coordinated with an adjacent project, certain right-of-way conditions have not yet been completed.

Other approving departments, such as SDOT in the last example above, must give their approval for a TCO to be granted.

Both the permanent C of O and TCO are tied to an active building permit. You must keep your building permit renewed in order to get your certificate of occupancy.

Posting Requirements

According to the Seattle Building Code, you are required to post the C of O in an obvious place on the premises. C of Os may not be removed at any time, except by the building official. Posting the C of O facilitates inspection by the Fire Department and other regulatory agencies.

Penalties and Exemptions

Occupancy of a space or building without a C of O is a violation of the Seattle Building Code and carries financial penalties. If you let your TCO expire without renewing it and without a permanent C of O, we may issue a Notice of Violation.

For buildings older than 1956 with no change in occupancy, a new C of O is not required and no penalty applies. Property owners who want to have a C of O for an existing building for financial or real estate purposes may apply for the certificate without construction components.

Learning the History of Your Building

Applicants can research available building records from after 2004 on our permit and property research site, <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>. For permit history for buildings built between 1900 and 1974, email SCI_Microfilm@seattle.gov. If you need a copy of an issued plan, you will need to send your request to SCI_Microfilm@seattle.gov. You can also visit our Microfilm Library, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave., (206) 233-5180.

Note: Historical research can be challenging because building code occupancies have changed significantly over time. C of Os were first required in Seattle in 1956. That means older buildings that have not changed occupancies will not have any C of O records.

For additional information about C of O's, call our Inspection Services at **(206) 684-8950**.

Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of SDCI **Tips** and other helpful publications are available on our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci/resources. Paper copies of these documents are available from our Public Resource Center, located on the 20th floor of Seattle Municipal Tower at 700 Fifth Ave. in downtown Seattle, (206) 684-8467.