

Seattle Permits

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

Factory-Assembled Structures for Residential and Commercial Use

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Factory-assembled structures include both residential and commercial structures that are built off-site in a factory and are later transported to a building site for installation. The State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) regulates and approves the construction of all factory-assembled structures that are sold, leased or used in Washington state. Site installation requirements and inspections vary with the type and use of the factory-assembled structure and are generally the responsibility of the local jurisdiction where the structure is to be located.

This Tip describes the types of factory-assembled structures allowed in Seattle, along with their permitting and inspection requirements.

Permitted Residential Structures

Two types of residential structures built in factories are permitted in the city of Seattle if they comply with local code requirements, such as structure setbacks, side and rear yards, environmentally critical areas (ECAs), and other development standards, including:

1. Factory-assembled structures (typically described as manufactured housing) that are approved by L&I with issuance of a red seal insignia certifying that they meet standards of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
2. A type typically described as modular construction (used for residential and non-residential purposes) is approved by L&I with issuance of a gold seal insignia certifying that it meets the standards of the Washington State Building Code.

The City of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, adopted in July 1994, and updated in 2004, states in Housing Policy H19:

Allow the use of modular housing, conforming to the standards of the State of Washington building and energy codes, and manufactured housing, built to standards established by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Modular and manufactured houses shall be permitted on individual lots in any land use zone where residential uses are permitted.

Red Seal Housing Insignia

Factory-assembled housing with a red seal insignia (typically referred to as manufactured housing or "red seal housing") is regulated through the National Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards Act of 1974 as administered by HUD. The act sets minimum construction standards that preempt local and state building codes for all manufactured housing built after June 15, 1976. The red seal is issued through L&I, which inspects the factories assembling manufactured housing to certify compliance with HUD standards. This approval also applies to the plumbing, heating, electrical and other components within the structure.

Red seal housing has two separate information plates. The first, a red seal insignia, is discussed below. The second is a data plate, located near the main electrical panel, which lists important information about the home itself, including where and on what date the home was built, a list of major equipment installed in the home, and the structural earthquake zone and wind loads for which the home was designed.

The red seal insignia must be attached to each transportable section of manufactured housing, located at the tail light end of each section. It is a 2" x 4" label on aluminum, stamped with a number composed of three letters followed by six digits (e.g., ABC - 000001). The three letters identify the inspection agency responsible for inspecting a manufactured housing factory.

All building plans, subsequent alterations to building plans, and construction of red seal housing must be approved by L&I. If alterations to the housing structure

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are made prior to or during installation or after occupancy without L&I approval, the red seal insignia will be invalidated. Manufacturers who wish to alter red seal housing must revise the building plans and resubmit them to L&I for reapproval. If an owner wishes to alter a red seal structure after occupancy, and applies for a permit to make such alterations, the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) requires either proof that such alteration has been L&I-approved prior to permit issuance or that the plans have been approved and stamped by a licensed engineer or architect.

Is a foundation required?

Although red seal housing may not be required to be placed on a foundation, the HUD standards do require the manufacturers to make provisions for both an anchoring system and a foundation to be used for installation by a HUD-certified installer. The manufacturer is not, however, required to provide the anchoring system or stabilizing devices. Owners should look at the manufacturer's instructions for more information. HUD standards include specifications for foundations.

By design, red seal housing can be used with or without a permanent foundation conforming to the Seattle Building Code (SBC). Additional information on permanent foundations for manufactured housing can be ordered from HUD at 1-800-245-2691, or the information can be accessed at the [HUD User website](#).

At time of purchase, a lending institution may require the use of a permanent foundation conforming to the SBC. SDCI recommends that owners install factory-assembled structures on a permanent foundation. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veteran's Administration (VA) are two lending institutions that require a permanent foundation with manufactured housing. (**NOTE:** Please check with your lender before installation.)

What are mobile homes?

Mobile homes are factory-assembled housing built before June 15, 1976, when the HUD Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards went into effect. There will be no red seal insignia on mobile homes, and they do not meet local building code requirements. In Seattle, mobile homes are typically located in established mobile home parks.

Gold Seal Insignia

Factory-assembled structures with a gold seal insignia (typically referred to as modular or "gold seal buildings") are regulated by state standards for housing body and frame construction as determined by state law (Wash-

ington Administrative Code 296-150B). **Gold seal buildings may be used for commercial or residential uses.** The structure must comply with the Washington State Building, the Mechanical, the Plumbing, and Energy codes, and must be placed on a permanent foundation conforming to the SBC. The gold seal insignia must be placed on or near the meter base or near the location where electrical service enters the structure.

If alterations to the gold seal structure are made before occupancy without the prior approval of L&I, the gold seal insignia will be invalidated. Manufacturers must resubmit a building plan and design for approval. Approved alterations will be added as a data plate on the gold seal building. The additional data plate will state what alterations have been made and the date of approval. Alterations made after the gold seal building is occupied are subject to the review and approval of the local jurisdiction.

In summary, gold seal buildings differ from red seal housing in three important ways:

1. Gold seal buildings must be installed on a permanent foundation.
2. Gold seal buildings are built to the Washington State Building, Mechanical, Plumbing and Energy codes.
3. Gold seal buildings are built according to the state L&I construction standards, as opposed to HUD construction standards.

Permitted Nonresidential Structures

A factory-assembled structure built for nonresidential use (typically referred to as a commercial coach) is approved by L&I with issuance of a black seal or gold seal insignia certifying that the structure was manufactured in compliance with state standards.

Black Seal Insignia

Nonresidential factory-assembled structures with a black seal insignia are called commercial coaches. The black seal insignia certifies that the structure is manufactured in compliance with state standards.

Commercial coaches must comply with the Washington State Building Code (for occupancy determination), the State Mechanical, Plumbing, the Energy codes, as well as other standards outlined in Washington State Law. (WAC 296-150B). **Coaches must be placed on a permanent foundation conforming to the Seattle Building Code.** This insignia can be found adjacent to the entry door, at least 12 inches above the floor line.

Table 1: Comparison of the Three Types of Factory-Assembled Structures

Insignia Required	Use	Construction Code Requirements	Construction Location ¹	Who Inspects Construction in Factory?	Who Inspects the On-Site Structure?
Red Seal (Manufactured Housing)²	Residence	Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	Factory	State Labor and Industries (L&I) for HUD ³	City of Seattle
Gold Seal (Modular Construction)²	Residence or Non-Residence ⁴	Washington State Building Code	Factory	L&I	City of Seattle
Black Seal (Commercial Coaches)	Non-Residence (Temporary Only)	Washington Administrative Code - Commercial	Factory	L&I	City of Seattle

¹ Construction of that portion of the structure above the foundation.

² Manufactured housing and modular construction for residential purposes are frequently used terms to describe certain types of factory-assembled housing, but these terms are often misused and not consistently defined. Due to this problem, the L&I insignia system is used in this Tip to distinguish between types of factory-assembled housing.

³ L&I inspects the assembly of factory-assembled structures for manufacturers in Washington State. Factory-assembled structures assembled in other states would be inspected by the state agency acting for HUD.

⁴ Gold Seal could be commercial if constructed to commercial requirements.

Commercial coaches can only be used as temporary structures designed for human occupancy for industrial, educational, assembly, professional or other commercial purposes. They can include temporary office buildings and portable school classrooms.

Commercial coaches that are portable classrooms have additional requirements for ventilation, heating, cooling and temperature-control systems. These systems must be designed by a professional engineer registered in the state of Washington and experienced in the design of heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems.

In addition to the black seal insignia, commercial coaches have an identification plate which lists important information about the non-residential structure, such as where and on what date the structure was manufactured and an assigned identification number for the structure.

Gold Seal Insignia

See information about permitted nonresidential structures in previous Gold Seal section on page 2.

Local Regulatory Requirements: Permits, Fees, and Inspections

Building Permit Requirements

In order to install a factory-assembled structure on a site, you must apply for a building permit from SDCI through the [Seattle Services Portal](#). There are different requirements for each of the three factory-assembled structures. (See Table 2 on page 6.)

Please note that with your building permit application, you will be asked to supply a reference copy of the approved plans and specifications for the factory-assembled structure verifying design and construction approval from L&I. The design drawings submitted to SDCI must include foundation details for connections to the factory-assembled structure, as well as the unique foundation design appropriate for the slope and soil conditions of the site.

A site plan of the site showing the location of the factory-assembled structure with setbacks and yard requirements noted is necessary to ensure compliance with the Seattle Land Use Code.

Installation does not cover any additions or accessory structures, unless specifically included in the L&I approvals, such as a deck, porch, carport or garage, since these elements are typically constructed on-site. If you are planning to add accessory structures on the site, you will need to include information relating to these in your application to erect the base building or subsequently obtain an additional building permit from SDCI. If accessory structures are partially supported by factory-assembled structures, such additional loads must be included in the L&I approvals.

Additional Requirements for Red Seal Housing

As of July 1, 1995, red seal housing may not be installed in Washington without a certified manufactured housing installer providing on-site supervision whenever installation work is being performed.

Exceptions are allowed for homeowners performing installation work on their own homes. Installation is defined as all on-site work necessary for the installation of red seal housing, including, but not limited to, construction of the foundation (if any), support piers, anchors, skirting, and connections to the water and sewer systems. It does not include site preparation or accessory structures that are constructed, such as garages, carports and decks, which are items subject to SDCI inspections. SDCI will inspect the foundation when it meets SBC standards.

When the foundation does not meet SBC standards, SDCI may require an independent inspection by a person knowledgeable with the federal standards (an architect, engineer, or other licensed professional certified by L&I). After the inspection, this independent inspector will be required to submit a letter to SDCI attesting that the installment meets federal standards, as administered by L&I.

Red seal housing must be installed per the manufacturer's instructions, which are approved by HUD. A building permit application must include either the name and registration number of the contractor or licensed manufactured home dealer or the name and certification number of the certified installer. SDCI cannot issue the permit without this information.

Additional Requirements for Black Seal Commercial Coaches

According to the SBC, commercial coaches may be installed as temporary office or other uses approved by the building official for 18 months. A permit for a commercial coach used as temporary office space may be renewed and an inspection made to ensure continued compliance with the SBC and the Land Use Code. Com-

mercial coaches may be placed on a temporary foundation, meeting the requirements in SBC Section 106.13, and must be anchored to resist wind and seismic forces.

Floating Homes

While floating homes and floats are also typically factory-built, they are regulated differently than other factory-assembled structures covered by this Tip. L&I does not review or inspect floating homes or floats. L&I considers floating homes distinct from other types of factory constructed or modular buildings in that they are sited over water, not on a "building site" on land as defined per RCW 43.22.450.

A construction permit from SDCI is required for all floating homes and float construction.

- SDCI plan review is required for new floating home and float construction.
- SDCI inspections are required. Depending on the factory location and/or project specific details, SDCI may require special inspection by an approved WABO inspector. For inspections outside of the City, there will be an additional hourly fee for travel to the site for each inspection. SDCI inspections must be complete before your request to cover.
- For Land Use code requirement for floating homes see Tip 229, [Residential Use of a Floating Home, House Barge, Floating On-Water Residence, or Vessel With a Dwelling Unit](#).

Plumbing and gas piping permits are required by Public Health-Seattle King County (PH-SKC).

Other Permits Required

Installation of factory-assembled structures may require some or all of the following:

- Curb cut permit from SDCI if there will be a new driveway cut.
- Gas piping permit from Seattle - King County Dept. of Public Health, if gas appliances will be installed.
- Plumbing permit from Seattle - KC Dept. of Public Health if any plumbing is added to the structure.
- Service connection from Seattle City Light.
- If the permit includes any excavation, a SDCI Construction Stormwater Control Plan and/or Drainage Standard Plan will be required.

- A side-sewer permit from SDCI is required for new sewer hookups.
- If your factory-assembled structure will be located in an ECA, plan review will be required and the foundation plan might be required to be designed by a licensed structural engineer and must be approved by a geotechnical engineer licensed by the state of Washington. A soils report prepared by the geotechnical engineer will be required. To find out if your site is in an ECA, [contact SDCI](#).

Fees

For information about building permit fees for factory-assembled structures, refer to the Fee Subtitle or contact the SDCI Public Resource Center at (206) 684-8467. You may also find current fee ordinance information on our [Fee Code webpage](#).

Inspection Requirements

After the factory-assembled structure has been sited, you will need to schedule an inspection. SDCI inspects the structure to ensure that it has been properly sited and meets all applicable code requirements. Manufacturer's instructions must be at the site for an inspector to review during the inspection. Call SDCI at (206) 684-8900 to schedule an inspection.

The following list includes inspection requirements for factory-assembled structures, organized by the City department responsible for the inspection. (These requirements may vary depending on the type of structure installed.)

Seattle Department of Planning and Development: (206) 684-8600

- Inspection of yard and setback requirements
- Inspection of permanent foundation (when required)
- Inspection of electrical hookup
- Inspection of site grading
- Inspection of side sewer
- Inspection of stormwater control used during construction/installation
- Inspection of any required infiltration pit or commercial parking lot drainage

Seattle Transportation: (206) 684-5283

- Inspection of driveway cuts

Seattle Public Utilities: (206) 684-5800

- Inspection of water hookup

Seattle-King County Department of Public Health: (206) 296-1175

- Inspection of plumbing and gas piping

Important Information to Remember

- Make sure that you get a building permit to install all factory-assembled structures. In addition, if you are adding porches, decks, or garages, you must get a building permit for those additions. If desired, multiple related permit requests could be combined together under one permit for all activity on the site. For more information, [contact SDCI](#).
- All factory-assembled structures must have an L&I insignia plate.
- Alterations to any of these structures must have prior approval from L&I. If prior approval is not obtained, the insignia approval is no longer valid.
- If you are purchasing a red seal housing structure, you will want to check with your lending institution for additional installation requirements. The FHA and VA have additional requirements for foundations for manufactured housing.
- Make sure the site you have chosen is suitable for your factory-assembled structure. The site must have adequate drainage and load-bearing capacity. In addition, be aware of any Land Use and Zoning Code restrictions, such as ECAs and building setbacks.
- If you are planning to install a solid-fuel burning appliance (such as a wood stove or pellet stove), you must have a UL-listed appliance specifically for use in manufactured housing. For more information call the SDCI Electrical Permit Counter at (206) 684-8464.
- Remember that black seal commercial coaches are intended for temporary uses, not as a permanent structure.

Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of SDCI Tips, Director's Rules, and the Seattle Municipal Code are available on the [SDCI website](#).

Table 2: Installation Requirements for Factory-Assembled Structures

City Permits and Information Required	Types of Factory-Assembled Structures		
	Red Seal Insignia	Gold Seal Insignia	Black Seal Insignia
Type of Building Permit Required from SDCI	Expedited review (ER), with installation certification per L&I requirements	ER, but more extensive plan review may be required for difficult sites or complex foundation plans	ER
Site Plan (see SDCI Tips #103 and #103A)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Site Drainage Plan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Site Grading Permit (Excavation Plan)	If exceeding grading threshold, or if located in an ECA	If exceeding grading threshold, or if located in an ECA	If exceeding grading threshold, or if located in an ECA
Structure Foundation Plan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Copy of L&I Approved Factory-Assembled Structure Plans	Yes	Yes	Yes
Electrical Permit from SDCI	Yes	Yes	Yes
Certificate of Water Availability from Seattle Public Utilities	Yes	Yes	Yes
Plumbing Permit from KC Public Health Dept.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Site Inspection by SDCI Inspector	Yes	Yes	Yes
Foundation Inspection by SDCI Inspector	Yes, except special inspections required for HUD foundations	Yes	Yes