When and How to Report a Code Violation to SDCI

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The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections enforces many City of Seattle codes. SDCI usually begins investigating code violations when the public reports a potential violation.

This document explains what potential violations should be reported to SDCI and how SDCI investigates and resolves those reports.

Steps to Report a Code Violation

1. Make sure the potential violation is something SDCI can enforce. See the next section for examples of violations and codes enforced by SDCI.

2. Contact SDCI by calling the Violation Complaint Line at (206) 615-0808 or writing to SDCI Code Compliance, P.O. Box 34019, Seattle, WA 98124-4019. Please be sure to say that you want to report a potential code violation. You must provide the exact address of the property with the potential violation, or the address of the property next door or across the street from the violation, so that the inspector can find the violation site.

   You can also file a complaint online at: **https://cosaccela.seattle.gov/portal/**

   You do not have to provide your name when you report a potential violation. If you do, you may ask SDCI to keep your name private. However, if the investigation results in court proceedings SDCI may not be able to keep your name confidential.

   When inspection of the inside of a building is required, a contact name and phone number of someone who can let the inspector inside is necessary. The inspector must see a violation before beginning enforcement action.

3. You can learn the status of your report and the results of the inspection by calling (206) 615-0808. The complaint is usually assigned to an inspector within a week of SDCI receiving a report of a potential violation.

   You will be contacted by the assigned inspector if you provided your contact information and if you asked to be told about theresults of the inspection.

   The investigation status may be obtained from SDCI's website at **www.seattle.gov/sdci**. You will need either the address of the property or the case number.

Examples of Potential Violations

- Construction work conducted without a permit.

- Safety issues such as collapsing buildings or failing retaining walls, landslides that threaten a building, unsafe boilers or elevators, or unsafe electrical problems.

- Work that does not follow the plans approved in connection with a permit.

- Construction that exceeds allowed hours of operation or that produces excessive noise.

- Work along shorelines that prevents the use of posted public access or work in the shoreline without a permit.

- Using a building in a way that does not conform to the issued Certificate of Occupancy or is not allowed in the zone; for example, using a warehouse as a dance hall.

- Poor conditions in rental housing, such as rotting floors, no heat, or sanitation problems.

- Notice of eviction to a tenant of a rental house or apartment without a legal reason.

- Vacant buildings not closed properly to prevent entry or weather intrusion.

- Illegal operation of businesses in residential zones.

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- Illegal two-home (duplex) or three-home (triplex) buildings in neighborhood residential zones.

- Inoperable vehicles parked on private property in residential zones.

- Noise from exterior mechanical equipment.

- Extensive grading, clearing and/or plant removal in an environmentally critical area.

- Cutting down trees or cutting off the tops of trees on a steep slope.

- Constructing retaining walls on a steep slope without a permit.

Major Codes Enforced by SDCI

- Construction codes set standards for new construction and remodeling.

- The Housing and Building Maintenance Code sets requirements for safe and healthy rental housing. This code sets safety standards for all other buildings, including unoccupied buildings.

- Land Use Code sets standards for how land is used in all development zones.

- Weeds and Vegetation Code help control dangerous situations caused by plants growing into streets, sidewalks or improved alleys. It does not set a maximum height for plants on private property.

- Just Cause Eviction rules provide the acceptable reasons landlords can evict tenants.

- Tenant Relocation Assistance rules provide benefits to people forced to move because their building is being developed. Benefits include cash assistance to low-income tenants and advance notice of planned development.

- Noise Ordinance sets standards for equipment that makes loud noises. Examples include equipment used for heating, air conditioning, ventilation, refrigeration, manufacturing processes, and construction.

- Environmentally Critical Areas is a code that sets standards for development in landslide-prone areas, steep slopes, river or stream banks, flood-prone areas, wetlands, and fish and wildlife habitat areas.

How SDCI Responds to Violation Reports

SDCI investigates reports of potential code violations. SDCIs top priorities are health and safety violations. Emergency complaints will be investigated within 24 hours of a report unless the report is made after 2:00 p.m. on a Friday. Life-threatening emergencies and after-hours noise complaints should be reported by calling 9-1-1.

SDCI responds to emergencies in housing, land use, or weeds cases, by issuing an "Emergency Order" that requires compliance or progress toward compliance quickly, usually one or two days. SDCI can order a building to be vacated when it is unsafe. Violating SDCI's Emergency Order may lead to criminal prosecution.

Non-emergency housing and building maintenance complaints are inspected within ten days of assignment. Land Use Code violations are typically inspected within 15 days of assignment. Plant overgrowth complaints will be investigated as soon as possible.

When the department confirms a code violation, SDCI tells the property owner and requests action to correct the violation. If the owner does not fix the violation, SDCI issues a citation or Notice of Violation or, in cases of urgent or potentially dangerous conditions, an Emergency Order or Hazard Correction Order.

A citation results in an immediate financial penalty. A person who receives a citation can ask for a hearing either to challenge the citation or to request a smaller fine.

A Notice of Violation provides a specified amount of time to correct a code violation. That time allowance is based on the nature and severity of the violation. Owners may request an administrative Director's Review of a Notice of Violation. If property owners promptly obtain the necessary permits or otherwise make the required corrections after being told by SDCI that a code violation exists, SDCI usually will not pursue legal action.

If the owner does not correct the violations by the date indicated, SDCI may refer the case to the City's Law Department for filing of court action that could lead to monitory penalties imposed by the court. In addition, inspection charges may apply when a violation is not corrected quickly and additional inspections are needed to verify compliance.

SDCI can require that permits be obtained when a building is being used for a non-authorized purpose and can take action on construction that has been completed without a permit. Enforcement options include requiring that the non-permitted building be torn down, imposing additional permit fees, and referral for legal action to obtain civil penalties. When construction is occurring without a permit, SDCI can prohibit further construction until a permit is obtained by issuing a stop work order.

Violation of an order to stop work may lead to criminal prosecution .

Important Things To Remember

Please provide the precise address when reporting a potential code violation. Provide the SDCI project or permit number if a building permit or large sign is posted on the site of a violation.

Potential violations should be reported to SDCI's Code Violation Complaint Hotline at (206) 615-0808.

Access to Information

Links to electronic versions of Codes mentioned in this Tip are available on the SDCI website at **www. seattle.gov/sdci**.