

Disaster Guidelines for Electrical Inspections Frequently Asked Questions

Electrical Permits

Why are you requiring us to get an inspection after all that we've been through?

Inspections protect the safety and property of the general public and keep the impacts of disasters to a minimum. An electrical inspection is required if:

- Any part of your electrical system has been flooded,
- You are replacing damaged wiring or other equipment needing an inspection, or
- If your power has not been turned back on by your electrical utility because of damage to your electrical system.

I already have power to my house. Is it safe to turn everything on?

If you have any concerns, you should either get a licensed electrical contractor to look at your house and give you a recommendation or get an L&I electrical permit to inspect your existing electrical system before you turn everything on.

In flooding or earthquake situations the damage to your electrical system may be hidden from view.

How do I start the process to get my power turned back on?

If the disaster did not damage your electrical system, call your electrical utility to get your power turned back on. The utility may require an Agency Request inspection before turning your power back on. The Agency Request is a free inspection that you can arrange directly by contacting your local L&I office.

If the Governor declares a disaster and you had damage or any part of your electrical system was flooded, contact your:

- Local L&I office, directly, to arrange an L&I initiated Agency Request inspection, or
- Building official, or other disaster agency (e.g. FEMA, Red Cross, etc.) and ask them to request an L&I Agency Request inspection.

If no electrical problems are found during the inspection and the inspector determines your electrical system is safe, L&I will notify your electrical utility that it is OK to turn your power on.

If electrical problems are found during the Agency Request inspection, you:

- Will be given a list of what has to be repaired,
- Must get a normal electrical permit, make the repairs, and get an L&I approval inspection.

As soon as the inspector determines your electrical system is safe, L&I will notify your electrical utility that it is OK to turn your power on.

Getting your power turned back on may be delayed if the utility's system is also damaged.

How do I get help fixing the damage?

November 2009

You can do the electrical work yourself, hire a licensed electrical contractor, or have a friend help you so long as the friend is not compensated for the work (e.g. money, barter, etc.). You can check to see if your contractor is licensed at: <https://fortress.wa.gov/lni/bbip/>

How do I get an electrical permit for fixing my damaged electrical system?

You can get a normal electrical permit at any L&I office or online at:

<http://www.lni.wa.gov/TradesLicensing/Electrical/FeePermlnsp/default.asp>

What is the cost for the electrical permit?

It is normally against the law for L&I to not charge for normal inspections.

However, there is no fee when:

- L&I initiates an Agency Request inspection during a declared disaster, or
- Another agency makes an Agency Request for inspection.

For all other declared disaster related inspections, L&I charges a portal to portal hourly fee or the rate for a normal electrical permit, whichever is least.

How fast can I get an inspection? Does disaster damaged property have any priority?

Inspections are normally made within 24 to 48 hours of the inspection request. Inspections to approve declared disaster damage are given the highest priority. Other requests to inspect disaster related repairs are given priority over normal inspections.

After the disaster, what determines when I have to replace any or all of my wiring?

Any electrical wiring or equipment that has apparent physical damage must be repaired or replaced. You can find detailed information on repairing and replacing disaster damaged electrical equipment by clicking “*What’s New for Electrical Professionals*” and looking for disaster information on the L&I website at: <http://www.lni.wa.gov/tradeslicensing/electrical/>

Do I need a permit to replace damaged electrical equipment?

Replacing receptacles, snap switches, and individual circuit breakers does not require a permit and inspection.

If you need to change any wiring or other equipment, you will need a normal permit.

If you have flood damage, you may need to replace receptacles, switches, circuit breakers, and wiring. Then your normal electrical permit will cover all the work you do. National Electrical Manufacturers Association guidelines provide specific guidance on flood damaged wiring and equipment. Information is available at the association’s website: <http://www.nema.org/> and typing *flood damage* in the search area.

WAC 296-46B-110(2) Electrical equipment and wiring that has been submerged or exposed to water must comply with the following:

(a) All breakers, fuses, controllers, receptacles, lighting switches/dimmers, electric heaters, and any sealed device/equipment (e.g., relays, contractors, etc.) must be replaced.

November 2009

(b) All other electrical equipment (e.g., wiring, breaker panel boards, disconnect switches, switchgear, motor control centers, boiler controls, HVAC/R equipment, electric motors, transformers, appliances, water heaters, and similar appliances) must be replaced or reconditioned by the original manufacturer, or by its approved representative.

You can find detailed information on repairing and replacing disaster damaged electrical equipment by clicking “Permits, Fees & Inspections” (for permitting and inspection information) or “What’s New for Electrical Professionals” (for disaster information) on the L&I website at:

<http://www.lni.wa.gov/tradeslicensing/electrical/>

What type of precautions should be followed for electrical hazards?

Damage to electrical equipment can sometimes be hidden.

Electrical equipment exposed to flood water can be extremely dangerous if re-energized. Moisture can get into electrical insulation or silt may be lodged inside devices or equipment causing equipment corrosion. Floodwaters may also be polluted with chemicals, sewage, oil and other contaminants which can affect the ability of equipment to function properly.

- Do not assume that any part of a flooded or potentially damaged electrical installation/appliance is safe.
- Disconnect power prior to inspecting all electrical devices and wiring.
- Do not energize any electrical devices, equipment, or wiring if it has been submerged in water. These items may work and appear safe but once they have been under water, they could cause electrocution or fire. This can happen weeks or months after the event.
- Electric circuit breakers and fuses can malfunction when water and silt get inside. Discard and replace all circuit breakers and fuses that have been submerged.