

Disaster Guidelines for Electrical Inspections Frequently Asked Questions

Our organization is having a meeting about the disaster and what we need to get us through this period. Can you attend?

L&I will make every effort to attend. If we talk to each other, the impacts of the disaster can be reduced and we can better help you.

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

Inspections protect the safety and property of Washington citizens and businesses and keep the impacts of natural disasters to a minimum. An electrical inspection is only required if you are replacing 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.

Why has the building department told me to get an electrical inspection and permit?

The building department will only ask you to get an electrical permit if they know that your electrical system has been damaged.

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. For instance, 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. If you had damage, contact your electrical utility, building official, or other disaster agency (e.g. FEMA, Red Cross, etc.) and ask them to request a free L&I inspection. L&I can only make free inspections for other agencies.

If electrical problems are found during the inspection, you will be given a list of what has to be repaired. Before power can be turned back on, you must get an 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?

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 an 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?

When the Governor declares a disaster, L&I charges by the hour for disaster related inspections or the rate for a normal electrical permit, whichever is the least. It is against the law for L&I to not charge for inspections.

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

Inspections to approve disaster damage are given the highest priority.

If you come out to do a disaster damage inspection, why are you looking at my other wiring?

The inspector's primary job will be to look for any apparent damage to your electrical system caused by the disaster. If it is apparent that there are other unsafe electrical conditions in your building, the inspector is required to note it and notify you of the unsafe condition so that you are safe. You will not have to change anything that is safe.

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" and looking for disaster information on the L&I website at:

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

Why do I have to replace my wiring when FEMA told my neighbors that they only needed to replace their receptacles, switches and breakers?

FEMA does not regulate electrical installations in Washington. Many FEMA personnel are volunteers and may not completely understand the electrical requirements. For instance, if your wiring was submerged, it may have internal water damage that cannot be repaired. If you have electrical questions, call your L&I electrical inspector.

Do I need a permit to replace damaged electrical equipment?

Replacing receptacles, switches, and individual circuit breakers does not require a permit and inspection. If you need to change any wiring, you will need a permit. If you have flood damage, you may need to replace receptacles, switches, circuit breakers and wiring. Then your electrical permit will cover all the work you do.

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 disaster information) on the L&I website at:

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

What can we clean our electrical equipment with?

Because of the many types of equipment and different kinds of damage, L&I is not able to tell you what cleaning methods to use. If you are in doubt, you should contact the equipment's manufacturer for recommendations.