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# GUIDELINES FOR PERMITS AND INSPECTIONS FOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS THAT REQUIRE GRADING WORK

## INTRODUCTION

This Information Bulletin provides guidelines for permit requirements and inspections for construction projects which require grading work such as basement excavations, retaining walls, subdrains systems, irrigation systems, swimming pools, and placement of compacted fill soils. In addition, the Bulletin provides information on which Division of the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety's Inspection Bureau (LADBS-IB) conducts the inspections related to such permits. **NOTE: This Information Bulletin is not intended to cover every permit issued by the Department of Building and Safety. It provides general information on permits associated with grading operations.**

## DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this Bulletin the definitions listed hereunder shall be construed as specified in this section.

**ADDITION.** An extension or increase in floor area or height of a building or structure.

**BUILDING.** Any structure used or intended for supporting or sheltering any use or occupancy.

**GRADING.** Any excavating or filling or combination thereof.

**HILLSIDE AREAS.** Any land designated as a Hillside Area based on the latest Bureau of Engineering Basic Grid Map No. A-13372 and made part of this section.

## DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING AND SAFETY INSPECTION BUREAU (LADBS-IB)

The LADBS-IB divisions that are involved with construction permits and inspections consist of the Commercial, Residential and Grading Divisions. Inspectors for the Commercial Division that inspect the building elements such as, concrete, steel, and framing are identified in the Department as a Building Inspector or BI. The Commercial Division also contains inspectors that specialize in aspects such as electrical, plumbing, elevators and pressure vessels. Inspections and permits related to these specialties are not covered in the Information Bulletin.

The Residential Division inspects residential projects. Inspectors for the Residential Division are identified in the Department as a Building Mechanical Inspector or BMI.

The Grading Division includes two parts. One consists of geotechnical engineers and engineering

geologists who review reports submitted to the Department that address future grading, geologic hazards, etc. These reports are required for many projects, especially those in the Hillside areas which, have basements, deep foundations, retaining walls and/or are in seismic hazard zones.

The other part include the grading inspectors. The Grading Division inspectors may be involved in either commercial or residential projects if grading operations are part of the project. When requesting an inspection, knowing the permit type and which Division to contact greatly facilitates the inspection process. The best way to accomplish this is to keep track of the permit number. Requesting an inspection with the wrong permit number could significantly delay the inspection process.

## **GRADING PERMITS**

It is important to know when a grading permit is required by the Los Angeles City codes, because if a grading permit is issued, an inspection by a Grading Inspector will be required. A grading permit is needed when any grading (cutting or filling operation), or any earth materials are planned to be imported or exported to or from any grading site, except for work that complies with the exceptions listed in the Los Angeles Building Code (LABC) Section 106.1.2 and Los Angeles Residential Code (LARC) Section R106.1.2, which are copied below.

1. *An excavation which (a) is less than 2 feet (610 mm) in depth, or (b) which does not create a cut slope greater than 5 feet (1524 mm) in height and steeper than one unit vertical in two units horizontal (50-percent slope). This exception shall not apply to a cut which exceeds 50 cubic yards (38.3 m<sup>3</sup>) or which changes the existing drainage pattern.*
2. *A fill less than one foot (305 mm) in depth and placed on natural terrain with a slope flatter than one unit vertical in 10 units horizontal (10-percent slope). This exception shall not apply when the fill exceeds 50 cubic yards (38.3 m<sup>3</sup>) or when the fill changes the existing drainage pattern.*
3. *Excavations, located in hillside areas, for caissons or piles under buildings or structures authorized by valid building permits.*
4. *Excavations, not located in hillside areas, for basements, footings, caissons, piles, swimming pools or underground structures which are authorized by valid building permits.*
5. *Excavations for wells or tunnels or utilities, which do not provide vertical or lateral support for buildings, or adversely impact the safety or stability of private or public properties.*

*In addition, grading permits may be waived by the Department for excavations under buildings or structures in hillside areas, if the applicant can demonstrate that the site is relatively level, or the excavation is entirely for footings and/or grade beams not exceeding 5 feet (1524 mm) deep.*

## **INSPECTIONS BY LADBS-IB DIVISIONS**

### **A. Grading Division**

As mentioned above, inspections from the Grading Division can be required for either commercial or residential development. These inspections are primarily needed in the hillside areas of the City. Such building aspects that require Grading inspections include:

1. Retaining walls and associated shoring, and free standing walls not within the footprint and unattached to the building structure for one-unit or two-unit residential developments.
2. Retaining walls and associated shoring, free standing walls associated with slope repairs, and mass grading projects. Mass grading projects consist of subdivisions or slope repairs.
3. Retaining wall backfill and subdrains.
4. Area drain systems outside of buildings when a grading permit associated with the proposed development has been issued.
5. Subgrade observation prior to placing of compacted fill.
6. Planting of grading slopes.
7. Excavations under buildings or structures, including swimming pools, in Hillside Areas, when grading permit has not been waived. Note: Grading permit may be waived if the site is relatively level, or the excavation is entirely for footings and/or grade beams not exceeding 5 feet deep.
8. Excavation for caissons or piles not under buildings or structures in Hillside Areas.
9. Installations of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS).
10. Haul route monitoring.

### **B. Residential Division**

Residential inspectors inspect construction projects for one- and two-unit residential developments, including:

1. Retaining walls and associated shoring, and free standing walls within the footprint of the building structure.
2. Retaining walls and associated shoring, and free standing walls not within the footprint of the building structure but attached to the building structure.
3. Retaining wall subdrain when a grading permit associated with the retaining wall has not been issued.
4. Area drain systems outside of buildings when a grading permit associated with the proposed development has not been issued.
5. Subdrain systems underneath buildings for dewatering purposes.
6. Irrigation systems.
7. Excavations under buildings or structures in Hillside Areas, when grading permit has been waived. Note: Grading permit may be waived if the site is relatively level, or the excavation is entirely for footings and/or grade beams not exceeding 5 feet deep.
8. Excavation for caissons or piles under buildings or structures in Hillside Areas.
9. Excavations for basements, footings, caissons, piles, swimming pools or underground structures in Non-Hillside Areas.

### **C. Commercial Division**

Commercial inspectors inspect all the items Residential inspectors inspect (see section above) for three-unit or more residential developments and all commercial developments, plus the following:

1. Retaining walls and associated shoring, and
2. Free standing walls not within the footprint of the building structure and unattached to the building structure.

Table 1 provides a summary of the inspectors from the LADBS-IB Division assigned to cover the inspection for the different type of projects: Commercial and Mixed-Used Developments, 1 and 2 units Residential Developments, Three-unit or more Residential Developments, and Mass Grading projects such as Subdivisions, and slope repairs.

**Table 1. Inspector from the LADBS-IB Division assigned to cover the inspection  
(see the Legend and Notes below the table)**

Item No.	Inspection Item	Special Condition	Commercial & Mixed-Used Development	Residential Development		Mass Grading (Tract Maps, Slope Repairs) (1)	Remarks
				1 and 2 units	3-units or more		
1	Retaining Walls and Shoring (including pile foundations, if any)	Within the footprint of the building structure	C	R	C	n/a	Includes inspections of all elements of the wall (subgrade, rebar, subdrain, surface drainage behind the wall, etc.)
		Not within the footprint of the building structure but attached to the building structure	C	R	C	n/a	
		Not within the footprint of the building structure and unattached to the building structure	C	G	C	G	
2	Retaining Wall Backfill	Grading Permit is Required for Retaining Wall backfill.(2)	G	G	G	G	Retaining wall subdrains will also be inspected by G. Other retaining wall elements will be inspected by C, R or G (see item 1)
3	Area Drain Systems outside of buildings (e.g., patios, parking lots, flat landscape)	When a grading permit associated with the proposed development has not been issued (2)	C / C(P) (3)	R	C / C(P) (3)	n/a	
		When a grading permit associated with the proposed development has been issued (2)	G	G	G	G	
4	Subdrains underneath buildings for dewatering purposes	----	C(P)	R	C(P)	n/a	
5	Subgrade observation before placing of Compacted Fill	Grading Permit Required for removal and recompaction of soils (2)	G	G	G	G	

(To be continued in next page)

**Cont. Table 1. Inspector from the LADBS-IB Division assigned to cover the inspection  
(see the Legend and Notes below the table)**

Item No.	Inspection Item	Special Condition	Commercial & Mixed-Used Development	Residential Development		Mass Grading (Tract Maps, Slope Repairs) (1)	Remarks
				1 and 2 units	3 units or more		
6	Planting of graded (i.e., cut or fill) Slopes	Grading Permit Required for grading the slope (2)	G	G	G	G	
7	Installation of OWTS		G	G	G	n/a	
8	Irrigation Systems	----	C(P)	R	C(P)	R / C(P) (4)	
9	Excavation for caissons and piles under buildings or structures	Hillside Areas	C	R	C	n/a	
10	Excavation for caissons and piles not under buildings or structures	Hillside Areas	G	G	G	G	
11	Excavations under buildings or structures, when grading permit is waived	Hillside Areas	C	R	C	n/a	Grading permit may be waived if the site is relatively level, or the excavation is entirely for footings and/or grade beams not exceeding 5 feet deep
12	Excavations under buildings or structures, when grading permit cannot be waived	Hillside Areas	G	G	G	n/a	(see remark above)
13	Excavations for basements, footings, caissons, piles, swimming pools or underground structures	Non-Hillside Areas	C	R	C	n/a	
14	Haul Route Monitoring	Hillside Area	G	G	G	G	Haul routes are only required on Hillside Areas

*(To be continued in next page)*

***Cont. Table 1. Inspector from the LADBS-IB Division assigned to cover the inspection  
Legend and Notes***

**LEGEND:**

G : Grading Division

C : Commercial Division – Building Inspector (BI)

C(P) : Plumbing Section of the Commercial Division

R : Residential Division – Building Mechanical Inspector (BMI)

**NOTES:**

(1): Mass Grading (Slope Repairs, Subdivisions) - Does not include construction of building structures or swimming pools

(2): Refer to Section “Grading Permits”

(3): If a plumbing permit has been issued the C(P) inspects the area drains, otherwise the C inspects the area drains

(4): R for mass grading projects for 1 and 2 residential units, C(P) for the other mass grading developments