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## **Oregon wins federal funds to expand online building permits program**

(Salem) The Oregon Department of Consumer & Business Services will receive \$250,000 to make it simpler for electrical, plumbing, and heating-and-cooling contractors to obtain building permits, following approval of federal funding to expand the state's e-permitting portal. U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith announced that the funding was approved Nov. 16 as part of a federal appropriations bill.

"Streamlining construction permitting and inspections is an important asset to both creating a positive business climate and economic opportunities for Oregon businesses and communities," said Governor Ted Kulongoski. "These funds will allow us to enhance our support to moving construction projects forward and expand the success we've had in the Portland area to the rest of the state." The governor asked the Oregon senators in a February 2005 letter to seek the funding, and applauded their action in securing it.

Stan Heil of Heil Electric said trades contractors are enthusiastic about e-permitting. "We are optimistic that within the next several years contractors throughout the state will be able to pull permits, request and schedule inspections and even submit construction plans all via the e-permitting system," he said. Heil is co-chairman of the National Electrical Contractors Association's (NECA) Joint Legislative Committee in Oregon.

Launched earlier this year by DCBS as a pilot project, the e-permitting portal is a one-stop Web site that allows electrical, plumbing, and mechanical contractors to apply and pay for routine permits from six city and county building departments in the Portland tri-county area through a single Web site. The e-permitting portal, **BuildingPermits.Oregon.gov**, is coordinated by the DCBS Building Codes Division.

Glenn Grossman, service manager at West Side Electric in Portland, an electrical contractor, said using e-permitting saves hours of his time every week, and a lot of frustration. "The number one thing is it's all centralized, you're not shuffling papers all day," he said. "In the old way of doing things, there was all this faxing, keeping track of all the faxes, no verification that permit applications had been received. It was just a massive amount of time wasted.

"This is a real bonus for us contractors. I'm no typist, but I can fill out half a dozen permits in literally a matter of minutes, and that used to take hours," he said. The e-permitting system accepts credit-card payment for the permits and gives the contractor a receipt, which further simplifies the paperwork for contractors, Grossman said.

(more)

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Plans for the use of the federal appropriation include expanding the portal to the entire tri-county area, then to other cities and counties statewide. The pilot project currently gives contractors online access to permits from the cities of Beaverton, Hillsboro, Milwaukie, and Portland, and Clackamas and Washington counties. Contractors have used the site to purchase 1,736 permits worth \$168,460 since May.

“This is a great example of how state and local governments and industry can work together to make doing business easier,” said Cory Streisinger, director of DCBS. “E-permitting streamlines the construction permits process and keeps projects moving, which is good for the businesses that build those projects and also for the consumers who benefit from them.”

While other individual cities and counties around the nation are experimenting with e-permitting, Oregon will be first to put such a plan into action statewide. Oregon has a uniform building code overseen by the DCBS Building Codes Division and administered in most areas by cities and counties.

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