



# Building Safety Division Summer 2010 Newsletter

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## Special points of interest:

- Welcome message from Terrence Gift, Building Official
- 2009 IECC with Montana Amendments
- Details on common summer projects

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## Summer Brings Changes in Great Falls

This is an exciting and wonderful time to be living and working here in the City of Great Falls. The green of spring is visible everywhere and scents of new growth are in the air. And like the seasons here in central Montana, things have changed within the City Government somewhat at the Civic Center. Early this spring the Planning Department and the Community Development Department merged to create the Planning and Community Development Department. A resulting benefit is that access to the planning staff and the development staff can be found on the same floor in one office. This also has allowed the City to reduce overhead and increase efficiency in an effort to accomplish more with less.

The Building Safety Division has filled the vacant building inspector and building official positions with experienced folks. These recent staff changes have added fresh insights that complement our excel-

lent Building Safety Division team.

The recent upgrade of the City's software system to Innoprise Software Inc. has presented challenges during this busy spring building season, but we are all excited about the improvements and expanded networking capabilities.

Springtime is building time, and the Building Safety Division's permit staff was flooded with applications in April and May. We had a total of 51 plans waiting to be reviewed on April 23rd. This number had reduced to 28 plans in review by June 3, and the average review time reduced from 11 business days to just 8 business days.

Changes are happening with Building Codes as well. The State of Montana adopted a new Energy Code on March 26<sup>th</sup> -- which Helena claims sets the highest standards for energy efficiency in the nation. By summer's end the State

of Montana will be adopting the newest Building, Mechanical, Plumbing, and Electrical codes. The City has also adopted the current edition of the International Fire Code. All these code changes make for great need for sharing information and education.

Information and Education is the reason for this newsletter from your Great Falls Building Safety Division. We look forward to sharing the fruits and benefits of this first newsletter, and gathering together ideas for our second newsletter this fall. From the looks of this spring's changes, and with more hard work set for this summer, we expect more positive changes to share with you this fall.

Your friend in Building Codes,

Terrence Gift,  
Building Official

## Common Summer Projects—When Do You Need a Permit?

Summer is the season many homeowners tackle building projects. Typical summer projects include:

- Decks & patio covers;
- Garages & accessory storage buildings;
- Additions & remodels;
- Retaining walls and fences; and
- Window and door replacements

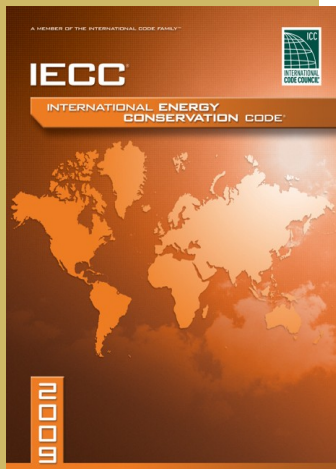
Although most residential building projects require a permit, with the following are exempt:

- One-story detached accessory buildings used as tool and storage sheds 120 square feet or less.
- Fences not more than 6 feet high.

- Cases, counters and partitions not more than 5 ft. 9 in. high.
- Retaining walls not more than 4 feet high measured from bottom of footing.
- Painting, papering and similar finish work.
- Window awnings if they don't project more than 54 inches.
- Decks that are not attached to a building, are less than 30 inches above grade at any point, and are 120 square feet or less in area.

Anything not listed as an exemption may need a permit.

Please contact the Building Safety Division with any questions by calling 455-8430.



## Energy Code Update

On March 26th 2010 the 2009 International Energy Conservation Code with Montana amendments (IECC) was adopted by the State of Montana, and became effective in the City of Great Falls.

Although some jurisdictions in the state are granted up to 90 days from March 26th to adopt the code, the City of Great Falls' building code requires that changes in the state code become effective in the city immediately.

The Building Safety Division will work with you to answer any questions you may have regarding the 2009 IECC, and will provide supplemental information to make this update as smooth and efficient as possible.

With a few specific exemptions, the 2009 IECC applies to all residential buildings in the state, regardless of fuel type.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has provided a summary brochure of the 2009 IECC as a reference guide for builders and contractors.

The brochure contains detailed information regarding a number of significant updates in the 2009 IECC. The following updates are explained in detail:

- Basement walls now require insulation;
- At least one-half of the permanent light fixtures must have high efficiency bulbs, such as CFLS;
- Heating system ductwork located outside of the conditioned (heated) part of a house must be tested for tightness;
- A solid "air barrier material" such as spray-in-place foam or foam boards sealed-in-place are required in rim band joists and behind tub/shower on exterior walls;
- Programmable/setback thermostats are required in homes with furnaces.

This brochure is available on line at <http://deq.mt.gov/energy>. Additionally, there are copies of available at the Planning and Community Development Department in room 112 of the Civic Center, #2 Park Drive South.

Everything you  
need to know  
about the Energy  
Efficiency  
Components Label  
ratings

## Energy Efficiency Components Label Explained

The Energy Efficiency Components Label certifies that a new home meets the minimum energy efficiency ratings for ceilings, walls, floors, doors, windows and other components required by the 2009 IECC. The label must be permanently affixed by the homebuilder to the interior breaker panel on all new residential buildings. What do all of these ratings mean? The list of definitions below provides the answers you need.

**R-Values:** Measures the insulating value of an object. The higher the R-value, the more insulating value an object has.

**U-Values:** Measures the heat loss through windows. The U-value of a window is a reciprocal of its R Value ( $U = 1/R$ ). Because the U-value is the inverse of the R-Value, a window with a lower U-Value has better insulating capabilities than a window with a higher U-Value.

**NFRC Unit Rating:** The National Fenestration Rating Council (NFRC) determines the U-Value for most windows. This rating should be used for a U-value if it is available on the installed windows.

**Energy Factor (EF):** Measures the energy efficiency of hot water tanks. The most energy efficient electric hot water heaters have an EF rating of .93 to .96. The most energy efficient gas-fired heaters on the other hand have EF ratings from .80 to .90.

**Annual Fuel Utilization Efficiency (AFUE):** Measures the effectiveness of gas and oil space heating systems. Although furnaces and boilers in the U.S. are only required to have a AFUE rating of 78 percent, the most efficient furnaces - depending on the type -range from 85 to 96 percent.

**Heating Season Performance Factor (HSPF):** Measures the efficiency of heat pumps, calculated by dividing the estimated seasonal heating output by the seasonal power consumption. The most efficient electric heat pumps have a HSPF between 7.7 and 10.

**Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (SEER):** Indicates the total cooling output of an air conditioner during its normal annual usage period for cooling, divided by the total electric input during the same period.

## Building Safety Division FAQ's

Have you ever wondered how to schedule an inspection, when a permit is required, or how many sets of drawings need to be included in a plan? If you have, you are not alone.

This section is dedicated to answering many of the frequently asked questions posed to Building Safety Division staff.

It is our goal to provide the answers to these questions early and often to help facilitate an efficient building process.

### How soon can I get an inspection?

An inspection request called in before 7 am can be scheduled for the day of the call, subject to avail-

ability. Requests called in after 7 am are typically scheduled for the following day. An answering machine is available to take inspection requests from 5 pm to 7 am at 455-8430.

### Do truss drawings need to be wet stamped?

No, truss drawings do NOT have to be WET stamped. However, they must be stamped by a Montana Registered Structural Engineer.

### Can truss drawings be faxed or emailed to your office?

No, we require that the truss drawings be submitted with the plans. On a case-by-case basis we have allowed a truss manufacturer

to resubmit truss drawings via fax or email, but like the building plans, only a hard copy of truss drawings can be reviewed and/or approved.

### When do I need to provide 3 sets of drawings and when is it okay to provide only 2?

Commercial building projects require 3 sets of plans, while residential permits require 2 sets. The 3<sup>rd</sup> set of plans for a commercial project is typically provided to the Fire Marshal and the Great Falls Fire Rescue Department to ensure compliance with the Fire Code.



## Decks in Detail

Are you planning on building a deck this summer? Will it be attached to your home or detached? How tall will the deck be? Before you begin planning or constructing a deck, take a minute to consult the information below to answer some basic questions.

### Detached decks with a height of less than 30 in. and not over 120 sq. ft. in area:

- No permit required if decks are less than 30 in. high, are not over 120 sq. ft. in total area, and are unroofed and unenclosed.

### Attached decks with a height of up to 30 in.:

- Requires a building permit
- Must conform to side and rear yard setback requirements of the underlying zoning
- The fee is based on the valuation of the structure

### Attached and detached decks over 30 in. in height:

- Requires a building permit
- Must conform to side and rear yard setback requirements of the underlying zoning
- The fee is based on the valuation of the structure

- Must go through construction plan review process

### Additional information:

- All decks, regardless of height, must meet all setback requirements of the underlying zoning
- Active easements must remain accessible



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### Building Safety Division—IN ACTION!

What were we doing in the field this winter and spring?

Check out the photos on the right to see Building Safety Division staff hard at work in the winter and spring.



## Employee Spotlight

Mike Haynes, Director of Planning and Community Development



Mike Haynes, AICP, joined the City of Great Falls as Planning Director in October 2009, facilitated merging the Planning Department and the Community Development Department and assumed the role of Director of Planning & Community Development on January 1, 2010.

Consolidation has provided a range of benefits and efficiencies including “one stop shopping” for the development community with one department responsible for growth and development within the city. Department staff conducts pre-development meetings, facilitates planning approvals (annexations, amended plats, rezoning etc.), conducts design review, plan review, permit issuance and building inspections, and ultimately issues certificates of occupancy.

The department is committed to a strategic approach to growth and development, working with developers and builders to encourage growth to occur in an orderly and efficient manner, while applying and enforcing State Building Codes and the city’s Land Develop-

ment Code in a fair and equitable manner.

In addition to planning, zoning and building, the department is responsible for permitting, licensing, code enforcement, CDBG and HOME program administration, neighborhoods, real estate and Civic Center maintenance.

Mike Haynes has a BA in Anthropology (summa cum laude) with honors in the major from the University of Central Florida, a Masters Degree in Urban & Regional Planning from the University of Florida and is a member of the American Planning Association and the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Mike came to the City of Great Falls from the Sunshine State. He has public and private sector planning experience, most recently working as the Chief Planner and Zoning Official for the City of Orlando and then as a Senior Project Manager for MSCW, Inc., an Orlando-based planning, design and engineering consulting firm.

Despite sounding like a native Montanan you might be surprised to know Mike was born and raised in London, England, but became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1990.

Each edition of the Building Safety Division Newsletter will feature an employee of the department to help you get to know our staff and the range of services we provide to the Great Falls community.