

## **Building Amnesty Press Release**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Oct. 6, 2009**

Owners of properties that contain structures built without permits have the opportunity to get into compliance without paying penalties under Pierce County's new Building Amnesty Program.

The program, operated by the Pierce County Planning and Land Services Department (PALS), is open to anyone who has constructed a building or purchased property with a structure that was built without the required permits.

Property owners have incentive to volunteer for this program. PALS is using state-of-the-art Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping tools to identify undocumented construction and business occupancies. Armed with that information, PALS inspectors will be contacting owners of those properties.

Property owners who choose to participate in the amnesty program will only be charged the cost of the permit – not the penalty fee - and they will get enhanced service from PALS staff to bring the property into compliance. Property owners who decline to participate in the amnesty program face an investigation fee - equal to the building permit fee and starting at \$250 – plus the cost of the permit.

“The Building Amnesty Program will improve health and safety throughout Pierce County as more properties comply with minimum life-safety code requirements,” said Chuck Kleeberg, director of the Planning and Land Services Department. “It’s also a matter of fairness. People in this program will still have to pay the regular processing fees.

“This program should take some of the confusion out of the application process,” he added. “Our goal is to help property owners create successful applications.”

The program provides the following benefits:

- \* No penalty fee for building permits.
- \* Structures will be reviewed for the Building Code in effect at the time of construction (compliance with all federal, state and local codes will still be required).
- \* No civil penalties will be assessed for site development work performed as a result of the construction.
- \* PALS staff will facilitate the application process.
- \* Construction plans for accessory structures are not required.

As they created the program, PALS staff received input from other Pierce County departments, including Community Services, the Economic Development Division and the Assessor-Treasurer's office.

Property owners who participate in the program may have the undocumented construction or changes in occupancy recognized by the county provided that the work and materials comply with all minimum program requirements. Examples include large jobs, such as new structures, room

additions or remodels, or small jobs, such as decks greater than 30 inches in height or storage buildings over 200 square feet in area.

The program's emphasis is on structures built since Jan. 1, 2005. However, owners with older buildings can still apply.

Applicants will need to submit the amnesty application along with a detailed site plan. For commercial projects and tenant improvements, a floor plan will also be required. This should be enough information for PALS staff to assist property owners.

In the next month, PALS will start distributing Building Amnesty Program information to property owners identified through the initial research. The program will run until Sept. 30, 2012.

More information is available at [www.piercecountywa.org/PALS](http://www.piercecountywa.org/PALS). Bulletin 66, "Building Amnesty Program," is in a question-and-answer format.

Information about the program, limitations, exclusions and applications can also be obtained by calling 253-798-3739 or by visiting the PALS Development Center lobby in the Pierce County Annex, 2401 South 35<sup>th</sup> St., Tacoma.

Contact: Chuck Kleeberg, Planning and Land Services, 253-798-3130; or Hunter George, Pierce County Communications, 253-798-6606 or [hgeorge@co.pierce.wa.us](mailto:hgeorge@co.pierce.wa.us)