California Coastal Commission
455 Market Street, Suite 300
San Francisco, CA 94105-2421
Voice (415) 904-5200
www.coastal.ca.gov

FACT SHEET

Emergency Permit FAQ for Homeowners

What is an Emergency Coastal Development Permit (ECDP), and when do I need one?

Most development activities along the coastline require a Coastal Development Permit (CDP). In urgent situations, however, the Coastal Commission and many local governments can quickly authorize certain projects, such as temporary shoreline protection, that may be needed to respond to emergencies. If there is an emergency that results in a potential risk to life or property that needs to be addressed immediately, you should contact the Commission or local government staff for guidance before starting any work.

You can find Commission District Office contacts here: https://www.coastal.ca.gov/contact/#/.

Will my project qualify for an ECDP?

- Is the proposed development necessary to address a sudden, unexpected emergency?
- Is immediate action necessary to prevent or mitigate loss or damage to life, health, property, or essential public services?
- Do you need to take action more quickly than the time it takes to process a regular coastal development permit?
- Is the proposed work the minimum action necessary to address the emergency?

If the answer is "**yes**" to all the above questions, it is likely your project would qualify for an ECDP. Please contact Commission staff as soon as possible to request an ECDP.

If the answer to any of the questions above is "**no**," the project will not qualify for an ECDP. For example, if a deck collapsed after a storm and is creating a hazard, an ECDP could authorize only the minimum development necessary, which may be limited to demolishing and removing the remaining portions of the deck.

Rebuilding the deck could be considered under a normal CDP process. Commission staff can assist homeowners to identify the type of work that qualifies for an ECDP in a given emergency.

Once an ECDP is approved and issued, the applicant must accept the permit and any conditions for the ECDP to be considered valid. ECDPs require a follow-up CDP application to be submitted at a later date.

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How do I get an ECDP?

If your local government (city or, for unincorporated areas, county) has a Local Coastal Program (LCP), it may have the ability to issue an ECDP. If you are unsure, you can reach out to local government staff in the Planning Department or the Commission. If the local government is not able to issue the ECDP for your project area, then please contact the nearest Coastal Commission District Office via email or phone to describe:

- The nature, cause, location and dates of the emergency;
- The impact the emergency has had on the property or the structure;
- The work proposed to address the emergency;
- How the proposed work is the minimum necessary to address the emergency.

Even if the emergency occurs outside of regular business hours, you should reach out to Coastal Commission staff and leave a voicemail or send an email. In some urgent cases, the work can be authorized to proceed over the phone or by email. In other cases, you may need to submit an application first along with supporting documentation, and the permit will need to be issued before construction can begin. Written materials and application forms should be provided as soon as possible in either case.

How long will it take to get a decision on an ECDP request during the 2026-2027 El Niño?

In anticipation of a historic El Niño event, Governor Gavin Newsom issued an Emergency Proclamation on September 21, 2026, requiring the Commission to accept such emergency permit requests either verbally or in writing and requiring that "When necessary to address an urgent need related to this emergency, the Commission shall take action on emergency permit requests as quickly as possible and within twenty-four hours of receipt."

See the Commission's El Niño website for more information on how to prepare for this upcoming storm season.

Where can I find the ECDP application form?

The ECDP application form is on the Commission's website. Along with the application, you will need to submit an application fee (that gets credited towards the follow-up regular permit), site photos, technical reports or assessments, recommendations from an engineer, plans, and potentially other information, depending on the circumstances.

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Why is a follow-up permit needed?

An ECDP only provides temporary authorization for emergency development. For long-term authorization, the ECDP must be followed by a regular Coastal Development Permit (CDP) application. If there is no need for long-term authorization or if the applicant does not apply for the follow-up permit, the development must be removed.

Each ECDP has an end date and specifies when a follow-up application is needed. When filling out the follow-up regular CDP application, property owners can propose to retain, alter, or remove the emergency development. Depending on the project and site conditions, the Commission may authorize long-term or permanent retention of the emergency development, or it may require the removal or alteration of emergency structures and/or restoration of site conditions.

It is important to understand that because emergency projects may negatively impact habitat, public access, and other coastal resources, property owners may need to address those impacts through mitigation required by the follow-up CDP. During the follow-up application process, staff will review the project to make sure it is consistent with the Coastal Act. Additional conditions or project changes may be required.

The regular CDP application form can be found here: Coastal Development Permit Application and Appeal Forms

Do I need a permit for temporary sandbags for flood or erosion protection?

No, Executive Order N-14-26 (signed October 27, 2026) exempts the placement of temporary sandbags from California Coastal Act permitting requirements for this 2026-27 El Niño season. This exemption applies to any type or size of sandbag, filled with sand only.

However, please follow the Coastal Commission's best practices for using sandbags, especially along shorelines prone to flooding. For example, do not use sand from the beach. That sand is helping to protect your property.

If I don't want the project approved temporarily, how do I get approval for a permanent project?

If the development approved via the ECDP continues to be needed long term, you can apply to keep the development in the follow-up regular CDP application, or property owners can apply for some design or project changes in the follow-up regular CDP application.

Alternatively, if there is a situation that is somewhat pressing but that does not need to be addressed immediately via an ECDP, you can instead apply for a regular CDP to

obtain longer-term or permanent authorization for a project. Governor Newsom's recent Emergency Proclamation of September 21, 2026, requires the Commission to review and act on permit applications for El Niño preparations on an expedited timeline.

What if I want to build a seawall?

The Coastal Act limits the circumstances in which the Commission can approve seawalls and other shoreline armoring. This is because most shoreline armoring can accelerate erosion and result in the loss of beaches, which provide important recreational opportunities and provide important protection for structures.

The Coastal Act does, however, allow shoreline armoring when certain conditions are met. Please contact Commission staff if you have questions and see this "Coastal Armoring, Explained" infographic for more on how armoring impacts our beaches.

What if I need to rebuild or repair my house that was damaged or destroyed?

After the emergency has subsided, there are different paths property owners can take when they are ready to repair or re-build structures. The first step is to contact the local government or Commission to determine if the project site is within the Commission's or local government's permitting jurisdiction.

If you have already applied for the regular CDP following an ECDP, you can coordinate with Coastal Commission staff to determine if the repair or rebuild can be included in the scope of work for that application.

If the structure needs to be repaired and the repair is limited or minor, there may be a streamlined authorization process available. Again, please reach out to Commission staff to discuss the scope of work.

More substantial repairs or building a new structure generally needs to be processed through a regular CDP application process. A substantially repaired structure or a new structure may need design updates to ensure that the structure is safe from future hazards.