

The Solid Gold Plumbing Permit

By Joseph P. Guzzo

Today we are inundated with all kinds of taxes. Taxes disguised as user fees, tolls, permits, licenses, etc. etc, there is no escape. Many will argue that there is a difference between a tax and a fee. Except for the bottom line, “you pay.” So it is only natural to associate a permit with a fee.

For the most part permit fees were created to compensate a City or Town for services provided. However many people only see it as raising additional revenue, and in fact some have taken advantage of collecting permit fees by raising the cost way over the service. If you dig deep enough you will find this is not legal. Now go back to what I just said, “permit fees were created.” Our regulations requiring plumbing permits have absolutely nothing to do with a permit fee. Collecting a fee is not part of the regulation. Cities and Towns are free to create their own fee structure if any. For Plumbers and the entire industry it is the permit that is important, not the fee.

Our plumbing permitting process was created as a vehicle to validate the General Law that only licensed plumbers can perform plumbing. The regulation is written in a way that all plumbing work with only two exceptions, the clearing of a stoppage, and changing a washer requires a permit. The regulation goes on to say that only licensed plumbers shall be issued permits. Section 3.05,1,b, *plumbing shall not be installed, altered, removed, replaced, or repaired until a permit has been issued by the Plumbing Inspector.* Without this regulation as it is written that requires a permit to be issued prior to the start of any work, to licensed plumbers only, the license requirement itself would be useless.

Think about it. Once you get your plumbers license this qualifies you to perform plumbing work, not quite. It actually qualifies you to obtain a plumbing permit then you may perform plumbing. It is amazing to me how many plumbers do not understand this great permitting process, and how many plumbers complain about permits. They would ask me, “do you want a permit for that?” My standard reply is, “if you don’t need a permit then anyone can do the job, the homeowner, carpenter, handy man.”

It is this permitting process that controls all plumbing work. It virtually locks up all plumbing work for plumbers only. All plumbers should feel privileged and honored that this system exists, one of the strictest in the Country, only allowing the clearing of a stoppage and changing a washer to be done without a permit, which means by anyone. And if it wasn’t for a strong plumbing industry, comprised of associations and dedicated professionals, more exceptions could have been added to the regulation. And don’t think they haven’t tried. Every year someone comes along and tries to weaken this system by trying to add to the permit exception. How about all plumbing repairs or all plumbing in a one or two family house? Remember, no permit, this would mean anyone could do it.

Our plumbing regulations were written over 100 years ago due to death and serious illness. The laws, permitting and inspection process work hand in hand. Plumbers that do not understand this must change their attitude about permits. Instead of thinking that everything revolves around the license, think of it as everything revolving around the

permit. And think of that permit as solid gold, money in the bank.

The next time someone tells you your price is too high, and they're going to do the job themselves, remind them that by law the job requires a permit, a permit they cannot get. And if they do the job themselves, some day it will come back to haunt them. Faulty workmanship which at least could cause damage to the home, at worst could cause death. Today there are numerous checks and balances when you try to sell or refinance your home. Banks, realtors, multiple attorneys, home inspectors, assessors, and insurance agents thoroughly check all records. Nothing like raising a giant red flag when they find no record of a permit for that new bath. Busted.

Just think of The Northeastern Massachusetts Plumbing & Gas Inspectors Associations motto, **CODE, LICENSE, PERMIT, INSPECTION.**

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