Energy Storage Permitting Guidebook

An initiative by the California Energy Commission's Electric Program Investment Charge (EPIC) Program

Streamlining Energy Storage Permitting in California

Helping AHJs and installers achieve faster, more consistent small-scale battery system installations

Behind-the-meter battery energy storage systems (BESS) help homes and small businesses stay powered through outages, integrate rooftop solar, and support grid stability. California is accelerating BESS adoption, but local permitting remains uneven across the state, adding cost and delay.

Outdated codes, inconsistent requirements, and limited communication between contractors and local agencies can slow down projects that would otherwise bring communities closer to California's climate and resilience goals. Fortunately, a handful of Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJs) are exemplifying how transparent and coordinated permitting practices can speed adoption without compromising safety.

Common Barriers

- **Patchwork processes:** Different submittal checklists, forms, and review steps across AHJs create confusion and rework.
- **Out-of-sync code cycles:** Local code iterations and interpretations vary, especially during transitions to new state building and fire code editions.
- **Unclear roles across agencies:** Cross-departmental coordination, such as between a planning department and a fire authority, isn't always defined early.
- **Limited online pathways:** Where e-permitting is unavailable, paper submittals and counter visits add time for both installers and AHJs.
- **Miscommunication:** Installers and AHJs may use different nomenclature or omit required attachments, triggering resubmittals.

Why Better Permitting Matters

Improving energy storage permitting is more than an administrative exercise—it delivers measurable benefits. Clearer guidance and online workflows shorten approval timelines and reduce resubmittals. Standardized checklists improve code consistency, ensuring all installations meet current safety standards.

Examples of What's Working

Several California jurisdictions are already demonstrating the value of streamlined permitting. Across these examples, three ingredients stand out: a single online "front door" for applications, clear communication channels, and accessible educational materials for installers and inspectors.

San Joaquin County offers a fully online permitting platform where applicants can submit plans, pay fees, and schedule inspections digitally. This single entry point simplifies communication, reduces paperwork, and shortens review times.

The City of Stockton's online portal includes a specific checklist for energy storage systems, clarifying what documents contractors must provide—such as equipment listings, layout clearances, and installation diagrams. The result: fewer resubmittals and faster approvals.

Contra Costa County now accepts fully digital submittals, allowing plan uploads and electronic tracking. The county has reduced processing time and improved applicant satisfaction by removing paper from the equation entirely.

The Payoff

When streamlined permitting processes are in place, approval times drop, errors decrease, and customer satisfaction rises. Even modest updates—like posting a two-page submittal checklist online—can dramatically reduce confusion and phone calls to permit counters.

Moving Forward

Energy storage is becoming a cornerstone of California's clean energy future, but its success depends on what happens locally. By modernizing permitting processes, adopting digital tools, and keeping lines of communication open, jurisdictions can make BESS installations faster, safer, and more predictable.

Better permitting practices aren't just possible—they are already working.

For more information and questions, please contact the Energy Storage Permitting Guidebook team at storage.guidebook@energycenter.org.

Download the California Energy Commission's **Energy Storage Permitting Guidebook**, prepared by the Center for Sustainable Energy, for free at EnergyStorageCA.com.

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