

OTTAWA BATHROOMS

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# Permits & Building Code

Building permits, Ontario Building Code,  
inspections, and compliance

5 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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# Table of Contents

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1. Do I need GFCI outlets in my bathroom?  
.....
2. What bathroom work requires a permit in Ottawa?  
.....
3. Do I need a permit to add an exhaust fan?  
.....
4. What is an ADA-compliant bathroom, and do I need one for my mom?  
.....
5. Who is responsible for getting permits, me or the contractor?  
.....

## Q1

### Do I need GFCI outlets in my bathroom?

**Yes, all bathroom outlets in Ontario must be GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) protected** - this is a mandatory safety requirement under the Ontario Electrical Safety Code that applies to all bathrooms, regardless of age.

GFCI outlets detect electrical imbalances and shut off power within milliseconds if they sense current flowing through an unintended path (like through water or a person). In bathrooms where water and electricity are present, this protection is literally life-saving. **The electrical code requires GFCI protection for all outlets within 1.5 meters of a bathtub or shower**, but most electricians install GFCI protection for all bathroom outlets to ensure complete safety.

**In Ottawa, this requirement applies to both new construction and renovations.** If you're updating an older bathroom that doesn't have GFCI outlets, bringing the electrical up to current code is typically required during any renovation involving electrical work. Even if you're not renovating, it's strongly recommended to upgrade non-GFCI bathroom outlets for safety - especially in homes built before the 1980s when GFCI requirements weren't as comprehensive.

You have two main options for GFCI protection: **GFCI outlets** (the ones with test/reset buttons) installed directly in the bathroom, or **GFCI breakers** at your electrical panel that protect the entire bathroom circuit. Most homeowners prefer GFCI outlets because they're easier to reset if tripped and clearly indicate the protection is working.

**This electrical work requires a licensed electrician** and electrical permits in Ottawa. During bathroom renovations, upgrading to GFCI protection is typically included in the electrical scope of work. For a free estimate on your bathroom renovation including proper electrical upgrades, request a quote from Ottawa Bathrooms.

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## Q2

### What bathroom work requires a permit in Ottawa?

**Most bathroom renovations in Ottawa require permits when they involve plumbing, electrical, or structural changes.** Simple cosmetic updates like painting or replacing a toilet seat don't need permits, but anything beyond basic maintenance typically does.

**Plumbing permits are required** for moving or adding plumbing fixtures, installing new water lines, changing drain locations, or adding a new bathroom. This includes tub-to-shower conversions, relocating toilets or vanities, and

any basement bathroom installations. Even replacing a toilet requires a permit if you're moving the drain location.

**Electrical permits are needed** for new lighting circuits, exhaust fan installations, GFCI outlet additions, or heated floor systems. Many bathroom renovations involve electrical work since older homes often lack proper GFCI protection required by current code.

**Building permits apply** when you're removing or modifying walls, changing window or door openings, or doing structural work. Complete bathroom renovations typically require building permits since they often involve multiple trades and structural considerations.

**In Ottawa specifically**, permit fees range from \$100-\$500+ depending on project scope. The City of Ottawa requires licensed contractors to pull permits for most renovation work, and inspections are mandatory at various stages. Basement bathrooms are particularly scrutinized since they require proper drainage, ventilation, and often involve foundation work.

**Unpermitted work can cause serious problems** - insurance may not cover water damage, you'll face delays when selling your home, and you might need to tear out completed work for inspections. Licensed contractors handle all permit applications and know exactly what requires approval.

For a free consultation on your bathroom project and permit requirements, Ottawa Bathrooms can guide you through the proper process and ensure all work meets Ottawa building standards.

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Q3

## Do I need a permit to add an exhaust fan?

**Installing an exhaust fan in an existing bathroom typically requires an electrical permit in Ottawa**, especially if you're running new wiring or adding a new circuit. However, if you're simply replacing an existing fan using the same electrical connection, a permit may not be required.

The **electrical work** is the main consideration here. Most bathroom exhaust fans require dedicated circuits or GFCI protection, and any new electrical connections must be done by a licensed electrician and inspected. If you're adding a fan where none existed before, you'll definitely need an electrical permit since this involves running new wiring through walls and potentially adding a new circuit breaker.

**Venting requirements** also matter in Ottawa's climate. The fan must be vented directly outside (not into the attic or soffit area) to prevent moisture buildup and ice damming in winter. This might involve cutting through exterior walls or the roof, which could trigger additional permit requirements depending on the scope of work.

For a **simple replacement** of an existing fan using the same electrical connection and vent route, many homeowners handle this as maintenance. However, if you're unsure about the electrical requirements or need to modify venting, it's worth having a licensed contractor assess the work.

**City of Ottawa requirements may vary** depending on your specific situation, so it's best to confirm with Ottawa Building Services or consult with a licensed electrician. They can determine if your project needs permits and ensure the installation meets current electrical and building codes.

For electrical work related to bathroom renovations, find licensed electricians through the Ottawa Construction Network who can handle both the permit process and proper installation.

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#### Q4

## What is an ADA-compliant bathroom, and do I need one for my mom?

**ADA-compliant bathrooms** follow specific accessibility standards to ensure safe, independent use for people with mobility challenges, though in Canada we follow similar **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)** guidelines along with National Building Code accessibility requirements.

An accessible bathroom typically includes **grab bars** strategically placed around the toilet and shower, a **comfort-height toilet** (17-19 inches vs. standard 15 inches), **lever-style door handles and faucets** that are easier to operate, and **non-slip flooring** to prevent falls. The shower should have a **low or zero threshold entry** with a built-in or fold-down seat, and there should be adequate **clear floor space** for wheelchair or walker maneuvering - typically 30" x 48" minimum.

**Whether you need one depends on your mom's specific mobility needs.** If she's experiencing difficulty getting up from low toilets, stepping over high tub edges, or maintaining balance in the shower, accessibility modifications can significantly improve her safety and independence. Many families start with **essential safety upgrades** like grab bars and comfort-height toilets before considering a full accessible renovation.

In Ottawa, **basement bathroom additions** are popular for creating accessible main-floor living, while **tub-to-shower conversions** with walk-in access are common upstairs modifications. A comfort-height toilet installation typically costs \$400-800, while grab bars run \$150-400 each installed. A complete accessible shower conversion ranges from \$5,000-15,000 depending on the scope of work.

**Consider starting with an assessment** of your mom's current challenges - does she struggle with the tub, toilet height, or shower entry? This helps prioritize which modifications will have the biggest safety impact. For a comprehensive accessibility evaluation and renovation plan, Ottawa Bathrooms offers free consultations to discuss your specific needs.

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#### Q5

## Who is responsible for getting permits, me or the contractor?

In Ontario, **either the homeowner or the contractor can apply for permits, but most licensed contractors handle this as part of their service.** This is typically the preferred approach since contractors understand the requirements and have established relationships with building departments.

**Most reputable renovation contractors in Ottawa will obtain permits on your behalf** as part of their comprehensive service. They know exactly what permits are required for different types of bathroom work, understand the Ontario Building Code requirements, and can navigate the City of Ottawa's permit process efficiently. This saves you time and reduces the risk of permit application errors that could delay your project.

**The permit responsibility should be clearly outlined in your renovation contract.** When the contractor pulls permits, they typically add the permit fees to your project cost and handle all the paperwork, inspections scheduling, and communication with the building department. This also means they're responsible for ensuring all work meets code requirements for inspection approval.

**However, as the homeowner, you remain ultimately responsible for ensuring permits are obtained** when required by law. If you hire an unlicensed contractor or handyman who doesn't pull proper permits, you could face issues when selling your home or filing insurance claims. City of Ottawa requirements may vary depending on your specific project scope - confirm permit responsibilities with your licensed contractor during the initial consultation.

**For bathroom renovations involving plumbing changes, electrical work, or structural modifications, permits are typically required.** A licensed contractor will assess your project and advise which permits are necessary, then handle the application process to keep your renovation on schedule.

For a free consultation about permit requirements for your specific bathroom renovation, request a quote from Ottawa Bathrooms - we handle all permit applications for our clients.

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**Disclaimer:** This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Bathrooms. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any construction or renovation project. Information is current as of February 23, 2026 and may change. Visit [ottawabathrooms.ca](http://ottawabathrooms.ca) for the latest answers.