

# 2014 Washington Solar Permitting Survey



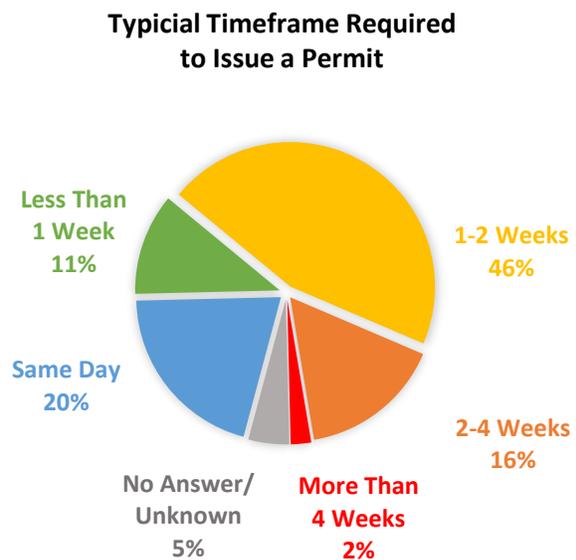
As Northwest Solar Communities seeks to streamline and standardize the installation of solar electric systems in Oregon and Washington, we surveyed jurisdictions in both states to develop a better understanding of the solar permitting process across the region. Following up on Energy Trust of Oregon’s [2013 Survey of Oregon](#), in 2014 Solar Oregon and the Washington State Department of Commerce developed an electronic survey asking local permitting and building departments throughout Washington to provide information on their jurisdiction’s permitting process. Information gathering centered on the following topics: Timeframe, Electronic Permitting, Fees, Inspections, and Submittal Requirements.

Solar Oregon, as a partner in the [Northwest Solar Communities](#) project, sent the survey to 249 Washington towns, cities, and counties, through contact information provided by the Washington Department of Commerce. In total, we collected 44 complete surveys. At the county level 18 jurisdictions completed the survey, representing 68.6% of Washington’s population. Additionally, 26 cities or towns completed the survey, provided permitting data at this level of government for more than 790,000 Washingtonians.

The results of the survey provide a snapshot of the status of solar permitting in Washington. While the responses demonstrate that some jurisdictions have a fairly streamlined process for permitting solar, there is much room for improvement. The new rule that deems certain standard systems to be eligible for an over the counter permit will certainly reduce timeframes in jurisdictions.

## Timeframe

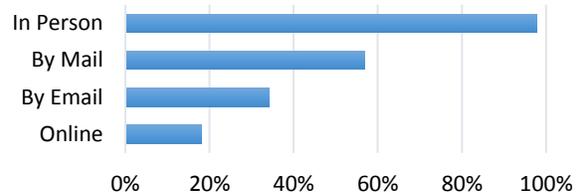
The time jurisdictions take to issue permits has started to decrease as more take advantage of the prescriptive permitting checklist. More than 1/5<sup>th</sup> of respondents reported having achieved the best practice of being able to issue a permit on the same day that an application is submitted. While the typical time to issue a permit for more than 30% of jurisdictions is less than a week, there is still significant room for improvement around the state as nearly half of respondents take between one and two weeks and more than 18% reported their typical time to issue a permit is greater than two weeks.



## Online Permitting

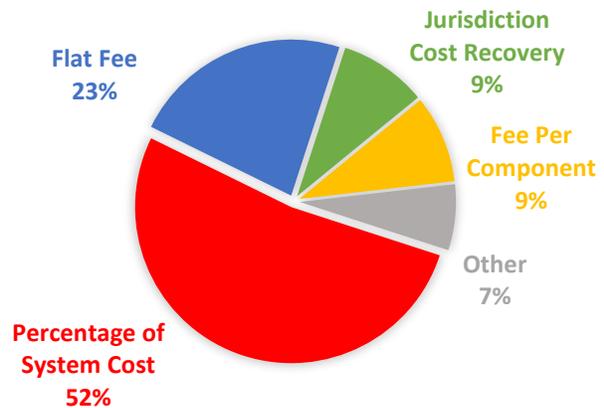
While more than 40% of responding jurisdictions reported having information on the permitting process available online for installers, very few jurisdictions have systems in place to accept and process permit applications online. Just over 18% have online permitting at the time of the survey. While some jurisdictions have built their own online permitting website, others utilize [MyBuildingPermit.com](http://MyBuildingPermit.com).

What are the options for submitting a permit application?



## Fee Structure

The vast majority of jurisdictions utilize a permit fee structure based on the percentage of the system cost. Only around 1/5<sup>th</sup> of jurisdictions use a flat fee structure. The adoption of more flat fee structures, especially for jurisdictions utilizing the over-the-counter permit process would help streamline and clarify the permit cost for installer across the state.



## Inspections and Submittal Requirements

While the type and number of separate permits required for a successful solar permit application vary significantly across the state, on average 1.52 separate permits are required. When submitting a permit application nearly half of the jurisdictions require installers to include a Fire Code Review within the required documentation. Lastly, jurisdictions require an average of 1.62 separate inspection trips.

## Next Steps

Data gathered from the survey is now posted in the National Solar Permitting Database at <https://solarpermit.org/>. Additionally, Northwest Solar Communities has developed a Solar Permitting Packet for Washington to guide jurisdictions in continuing to streamline and standardize their permitting process. This Packet can be accessed at <http://nwsolarcommunities.org/priorities/permitting/>.

For more information on this survey contact:

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