

Who Approves Your Dock? A Plain-English Permit Guide

A free DockSmarts guide for lakefront homeowners in Texas and the South

By Melanie Ross, 30+ years in marine construction, East Texas

Before a single piling goes in the water, your dock has to be approved. Permits aren't the fun part of a dock project, but they're the part you can't skip. Get them right up front and the rest of the build can move ahead without surprises.

After more than 30 years in marine construction, here's how I'd explain the permit process to a friend.

Who Approves Your Dock?

Depending on your jurisdiction, **several entities may require permits** for your dock. For example:

- **Your local homeowners association (HOA)**
- **Your local water authority**
- **The Corps of Engineers**, in some cases, if you're on a Corps of Engineers lake

All permits required for your project need approval from each individual entity. One approval doesn't cover the others. These steps cannot be avoided.

Pulled and Approved Before Construction Starts

All permits required for your specific area must be pulled and approved before construction starts.

Ask your contractor **whether you'll be pulling the permits, or whether they will.** Generally, the contractor does all the necessary paperwork and turns in the permits, and you pay the required fee, if any, to get them processed.

This is a vital step. **If permits aren't pulled, heavy fines may be issued.**

What You'll Need: Survey and Drawings

Permits may require some paperwork about your property and your design:

- **A pre-construction survey of your property boundaries**, so the builder knows exactly where your lot lines are.
- **Drawings of your boathouse design.** You'll probably need drawings showing dimensions, water levels, height, width, and so on.

Water depth and how far out you're allowed to build matter too, so have those questions in mind as your design comes together.

How Long Do Permits Take?

Permits can take **anywhere from about a week to, in some cases, up to three months**. It depends on the permitting agency's response time, and it varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Plan ahead.

Since approval can take anywhere from about a week to three months, start the permit process early. Build that time into your schedule before you count on a start date.

Permit Checklist: Questions to Ask

1. **Who approves docks on my lake?** My HOA, my local water authority, the Corps of Engineers, or more than one?
2. **Who pulls the permits**, me or my contractor? Who pays the required fee, if any?
3. **Will all permits be approved before construction starts?**
4. **Do I need a pre-construction survey** of my property boundaries?
5. **What drawings do I need?** Dimensions, water levels, height, width, and so on.
6. **How far out am I allowed to build**, and what's the water depth there?
7. **How long will approval take** in my jurisdiction?

Next Up: Hiring a Dock Builder

Your contractor will likely be the one handling your permit paperwork, so choosing the right one matters. My free guide "**Hiring a Dock Builder: Questions to Ask and Red Flags to Spot**" walks you through references, insurance, pilings, payment schedules, and lien releases.

Get More Straight Talk on Docks

This is one of four free DockSmarts guides. Join the **DockSmarts newsletter at docksmarts.com** for practical tips on choosing your dock, hiring a builder, storm and drought prep, and more, straight from someone who's spent a career on the water.

Disclaimer: This guide is general information, not legal advice. Permit rules vary by lake and jurisdiction and change over time. Check with your HOA and the local agencies on your lake before you build.

1. Who may need to approve it?

Your HOA

Homeowners association

Local water authority

For your lake

Corps of Engineers

Only if you're on a Corps lake

Depends on your jurisdiction. Every one that requires a permit must approve it.

2. What to gather

☐ Boundary survey

A pre-construction survey of your lot lines, so the builder knows exactly where they are

☐ Boathouse drawings

Dimensions, water levels, height, width, and so on

Water depth and how far out you're allowed to build matter too.

3. How long it can take

About 1 week

Up to 3 months



Depends on each agency's response time. It varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Plan ahead: start permits early.

4. Before construction starts

- ❗ All required permits pulled AND approved
- ❗ Ask your contractor: who pulls the permits, you or me?
- ❗ No permits = heavy fines may be issued

These steps can't be skipped.

Check with each agency on your lake before you build.

General info, not legal advice. Rules vary by lake and jurisdiction.

Print this page: who may approve your dock, what to gather, and how long it can take.