

Retaining Wall Permit — State Quick Reference

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This reference card covers permit thresholds, engineering requirements, and typical permit costs for 25 major U.S. states. Always verify with your specific city or county — local amendments frequently differ from state baselines.

State	Threshold	Eng. Required?	Typical Fee	Key Local Note
California	3–4 ft (city varies)	≥4 ft; many cities ≥3 ft	\$200–\$600	LA, SD, SJ: 3-ft threshold. Seismic zone adds complexity.
Texas	No statewide code	When city requires	\$100–\$400	Dallas: 4ft. Austin: 3ft. Houston: no zoning. Always check city.
Florida	3–4 ft (county varies)	≥4 ft; coastal ≥3 ft	\$125–\$450	Coastal/wind zones trigger at 30 in. Flood zone = add'l permit.
Georgia	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$100–\$350	Atlanta suburbs may use 3 ft. Red clay soils: engineering advisable.
Tennessee	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$75–\$300	Nashville: 4 ft. East TN counties: some use 3 ft.
North Carolina	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$100–\$400	Mountain counties: engineering common at lower heights.
Virginia	3–4 ft	≥4 ft; Fairfax ≥3 ft	\$100–\$500	Fairfax/Arlington: 3 ft. Rest of state: 4 ft.
Maryland	3 ft (most jurisdictions)	≥4 ft	\$125–\$500	Montgomery, PG County: 3-ft threshold. Chesapeake Bay drainage rules.
Colorado	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft; expansive soils often stricter	\$100–\$400	Expansive clay throughout Front Range. Engineering commonly required.
Washington	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft; ECA: any height	\$150–\$600	Seattle ECA zones: permit at any height. King County similar.
Oregon	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$100–\$450	Portland BDS: active enforcement. Hillside overlay areas.
Arizona	3–4 ft (city)	≥4 ft	\$75–\$350	Phoenix: 3 ft. Scottsdale/Mesa: 4 ft. Caliche soils affect footings.
Nevada	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$100–\$400	Clark Co: 4 ft. Las Vegas area active permit market.
Ohio	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$75–\$300	Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati: 4 ft. SE Ohio has hillside terrain.
Illinois	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$100–\$500	Chicago uses own municipal code — not IRC. Suburbs: 4 ft.
Pennsylvania	4 ft (PA UCC)	≥4 ft	\$100–\$450	Small municipalities may opt out of enforcement. Verify locally.
New York	4 ft (NYSBC)	≥4 ft; NYC: PE required	\$150–\$800+	NYC requires licensed design professional filing. Upstate: standard.
New Jersey	4 ft (NJ UCC)	≥4 ft	\$100–\$500	NJ municipalities must enforce UCC. Each has own Construction Official.
Michigan	4 ft (MRC)	≥4 ft	\$75–\$350	Detroit metro: active enforcement. Frost line 36–48 in affects footings.
Minnesota	4 ft (Minn. RC)	≥4 ft	\$100–\$400	Twin Cities: 4 ft. Frost depth 42–60 in affects footing costs.
Missouri	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$75–\$300	Kansas City, St. Louis: 4 ft. Ozarks: hillside terrain common.
South Carolina	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$75–\$300	Coastal counties: flood zone requirements. Lowcountry: tidal buffers.
Indiana	4 ft (IRC)	≥4 ft	\$75–\$300	Indianapolis: 4 ft. Hamilton County: fast growth, active enforcement.
Wisconsin	4 ft (WRC)	≥4 ft	\$100–\$350	Driftless Area (SW): steep terrain. Frost line 48–60 in.
Massachusetts	4 ft (780 CMR)	≥4 ft; coastal: lower	\$150–\$600	Wetlands Protection Act: 100-ft buffer adds 3–6 months for ECA work.

UNIVERSAL RULES — APPLY IN ALL STATES

- Any wall with a SURCHARGE (driveway, slope, pool, or building above) → permit required at ANY height
- TIERED walls closer than 3× lower wall height → treated as combined system → combined height for threshold
- Wall within 3–5 ft of PROPERTY LINE → permit required in most jurisdictions regardless of height
- Wall in FLOODPLAIN, WETLAND BUFFER, or ECA → permit + additional agency review required
- Any wall over 4 ft → engineering (PE stamp) required in virtually every U.S. jurisdiction
- Measure RETAINED HEIGHT from footing bottom to wall top — not from visible ground level

Disclaimer: This reference card provides general educational information based on state-level code adoption as of 2026. Local jurisdictions may use stricter thresholds. Always verify with your local building department before beginning any project. RetainingWallPermit.pages.dev — not affiliated with any government agency.