



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Guidance Notes

Application for a permit to carry out Specialist Activities in Antarctica

This guide is for anyone applying for a permit to carry out Specialist Activities in Antarctica. Specialist Activities include: mineral resource activities; disturbance of flora or fauna; the introduction of non-native animals, plants and microorganisms; and entry to protected areas. Please read these notes fully before completing the application form.

The Notes are divided into five parts:

- ***Guidance on specific questions in the application form***
- ***Application flow chart***
- ***Frequently asked questions***
- ***Useful links and resources***
- ***Contact information***

The Application form and these Guidance Notes were revised and re-issued in July 2022 and replace any previous versions.

You may be invited to discuss your application with the Polar Regions Department prior to completing your application.

Please contact the Polar Regions Department if you have any queries regarding this guidance or the application form.

Part 1 – Guidance on specific questions in the Application form

Please do not withhold any potentially relevant information when completing the form – failure to provide sufficient information may delay the processing of your application.

All applicants must complete Section 1. Section 6 should be completed unless these details have already been provided in the separate form entitled *Application for a permit for a British expedition, vessel or aircraft to enter Antarctica*, or you have enclosed your own Environmental Impact Assessment.

In addition, those planning:

- to undertake a mineral resource activity need to complete Section 2;
- to kill, injure, capture, handle, molest or disturb native mammals or birds or to remove or potentially damage native plants, or invertebrates or where this is a risk of potential damage to habitats must complete Section 3; and/or
- to introduce non-native animals, plants or microscopic organisms need to complete Section 4.
- to enter an area designated as an Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA) site should complete Section 5.

All applicable sections of the application form must be completed and the final page signed and dated.

Section 1 – Application Details

All applicants for a permit to carry out specialist activities in Antarctica must complete Section 1 of the application form.

Question 1.1 - Provide the full name and contact details of the permit applicant. This should be the person who is the intended permit holder and will be legally responsible for compliance with its conditions. In most cases the applicant is the project leader of the specialist activity, or the lead organiser of the activities being undertaken in Antarctica.

Provide a scan or photocopy of the biodata page of the passport of the applicant. These details are required for identification purposes.

Questions 1.2 – 1.7 - Provide full details of your proposed dates for entry to and departure from Antarctica (the Antarctica Treaty area – south of 60°S), the gateway ports, the areas you intend to visit and whether or not you have applied already for a UK permit to enter Antarctica. If you are visiting any areas protected under the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty, such as Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs) you should include this here. If in doubt, please discuss any issues with the Polar Regions Department in advance.

Please note that it is an offence to visit areas or conduct certain activities that are not specified in your application. If you need to undertake activities outside the conditions of your permit you must contact the Polar Regions Department before doing so.

Any person on a British expedition to Antarctica or taking a British vessel or aircraft into Antarctica must be covered by a permit to enter Antarctica. If you are a visitor supported by British Antarctic Survey (BAS) logistics or another British institution, they should already have requested a permit to cover your entry into and out of Antarctica. However it is your responsibility to confirm this with them. If not, you may apply for a permit to enter Antarctica at the same time as applying for a Specialist Activities permit.

Visits to ASPAs are prohibited, except in accordance with a permit issued under Section 11 of the Antarctic Act 1994.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to determine whether their itinerary includes visiting any such places and to include full details in the Application form. It is prohibited to damage, remove or destroy an Antarctic Historic Site and Monument (HSM). Please contact Polar

Region Department if you intend to carry out conservation work at a Historic Site and Monument.

Please discuss all applications for specialist activities in advance with the Polar Regions Department. The Department may also consult relevant experts in assessing your application. The Antarctic Treaty Secretariat (ATS) website (<http://www.ats.aq>) provides current details of ASPAs, their Management Plans and HSMs.

Question 1.8 – Provide details of all those who you know will be taking part in the specialist activities in Antarctica.

List which scientists and support staff have experience of undertaking the proposed activity in polar environments, or under similar conditions. Such experience should relate to activities similar to those being proposed.

We understand that staffing of science projects can change at short notice prior to departure. It will be a condition of the issuing of any permit that you submit a revised personnel list prior to departure, should any personnel changes occur.

Question 1.9 – If you know that the activities you are proposing will have more than a minor or transitory impact on the Antarctic environment, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), such as an Initial Environmental Evaluation (IEE) or a Comprehensive Environmental Evaluation (CEE), may already have been prepared by your organisation. If so, you should summarise the main findings here. You will not need to complete Section 6 of the application form but you should submit your completed Environmental Impact Assessment along with your application.

Question 1.10 – This question informs us which permit you will need to be provided with.

Section 2 – Permit to undertake mineral resource activity for the purposes of scientific research

All applicants planning to undertake mineral resource activities must complete Section 2 of the application form. Mineral resource means any natural resource that is neither living nor renewable. This includes, but not exclusively, peat, soil, lake & marine sediment, sea bed nodules, rocks, fossil and coal. Mineral resources activities include drilling, dredging, excavation, collection or identification. Mineral resource prospecting is not permitted under the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.

Please note that under UK legislation, permits for mineral resource activity can only be provided to British nationals. Foreign nationals may require a permit from another competent authority.

In answering the questions, please ensure that you have considered the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research's Environmental Code of Conduct for Geosciences Field Research Activities in Antarctica: https://documents.ats.aq/recatt/Att704_e.pdf.

Questions 2.1 – 2.5 – When completing these questions please ensure that a person without a scientific background would be able to understand what the project broadly entails.

Section 3 – Permit to kill, injure, capture, handle, molest or disturb native mammals or native birds; to remove or cause potential damage native plants or invertebrates; or to cause potential damage to habitats for the purposes of scientific research

Questions 3.1 – 3.6 – When completing these questions please ensure that a person without a scientific background would be able to understand the project aims and methodologies. We expect scientists who are working with animals on British expeditions in Antarctica to operate to equivalent UK ethical standards and to adhere to the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) Code of Conduct for the Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes in Antarctica (see the section “Useful Links and Resources”). To enable the Polar Regions Department to undertake an assessment of the proposed animal working standards, please provide details of any ethical review that has been conducted on your project. If you are applying as a University employee, your University is likely to have an ethical review process which you may wish to use. To help in this aspect of the permit process, the Polar Regions Department may seek advice from relevant experts, should this be deemed appropriate. An electronic or hard copy of your ethical review documentation may be requested

Question 3.7 - Activities such as the collection of living or dead microorganisms, plants and animal specimens, for the purpose of extracting future potential economic value (commonly known as ‘biological prospecting’) within Antarctica are not prohibited, but may be regulated by the national jurisdiction of the Party issuing authorisation. In order to assist with information sharing requirements under the terms of the Antarctic Treaty, it is helpful to know if you consider that the activity you propose to undertake in Antarctica involves or may subsequently lead to, any potential commercial activities.

Section 4 - Permit to allow the introduction of non-native animals, plants or microscopic organisms for the purposes of scientific research

Please note that permits will not be issued for the importation of non-sterile soil into Antarctica. Further advice on procedures relating to the introduction of non-native species can be obtained from Polar Regions Department. British Antarctic Survey staff should consult with members of the BAS Environment Office.

Questions 4.1 – 4.3 - When completing these questions please ensure that a person without a scientific background would be able to understand the project aims and methodologies.

Question 4.4 – Subsequent destruction, removal and waste disposal procedures must be carried out in accordance with the conditions which may be attached to any permit which is issued. Any introduced animals or plants should be destroyed when they are no longer needed, such as by autoclaving, incineration, sterilisation or other equally effective means and the remains removed from Antarctica. Please give details of how you propose to destroy or remove any introduced animal or plant.

Question 4.5 – Provide details on the species intended to be introduced.

Question 4.6 – You should also provide relevant risk assessment detail of the potential consequences of accidental release into the Antarctic environment.

Section 5 – ASPA sites

Question 5.1 – This should contain details of all ASPA sites which you intend to visit, including why you propose to visit them and dates of proposed first entry and last exit from those sites. You should also include details of ASPA sites that you may want to visit as a contingency, should local weather or other operational circumstances prevent you from

accessing your preferred site. You will not be allowed to visit any ASPA site for which you do not have authorisation.

Question 5.2 - As these are sites/areas afforded special protection under the Antarctic Treaty System, you must state the reason why the activities need to take place in those particular sites instead of within other non-ASPA Antarctic sites. Polar Regions Department may ask for additional information.

Questions 5.3 – These questions are asked to ensure that visitors understand the correct procedures and are aware of the appropriate standards of conduct when visiting each site. Each ASPA has its own Management Plan, which should be studied before travelling to, and carried while within, the specific ASPA. When answering this question you should summarise how you will ensure you adhere to the provisions described in the Management Plan for the ASPA(s) you intend to visit.

Question 5.5 – you should state if you are planning to camp in an ASPA and for how long.

Further details on ASPA's can be found at the following link:

http://www.ats.aq/e/ep_protected.htm

Please note that if you are travelling to an ASPA you must complete this question. Answering only the questions in Section 1 relating to general Antarctic entry and activities is not sufficient to gain permission, in the form of a permit, to enter any ASPA(s) site(s).

Section 6 – Environmental Impact: Preliminary Environmental Assessment

You should complete this section unless these details have already been provided within the separate *Application for a permit for a British expedition, vessel or aircraft to enter Antarctica* or you have enclosed your own Environmental Impact Assessment.

Appropriate assessment and mitigation of the environmental impact of the proposed expedition, vessel or aircraft activity in Antarctica is an important element of the permit application process. This section is a preliminary environmental assessment (PEA) to determine the degree of impact of the planned activity on the Antarctic environment.

In cases where the proposed activity may have an environmental impact that is equal or greater than minor or transitory, a further comprehensive and detailed environmental impact assessment may be needed. This would take the form of either an Initial Environmental Evaluation (IEE), or a Comprehensive Environmental Evaluation (CEE). The Polar Regions Department will normally require that these are prepared by the applicant, with the assistance of a competent environmental professional where appropriate. Additional time in the application process should be allowed if there is doubt about the need for such an assessment. Additional time should also be allowed for scrutiny of the environmental impact assessments.

Activities that would typically require an IEE or CEE would include:

- pioneering a new over-land route within the Antarctic Treaty area
- undertaking activities away from a research station during the Antarctic winter
- other activities would be the construction or modification of a British research station in Antarctica.
- or in ways which may otherwise have more than a minor or transitory impact

Question 6.1 – A full list of Antarctic Specially Managed Areas (ASMAs) can be found on the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat (ATS) website at:

https://www.ats.aq/documents/ATCM40/WW/atcm40_ww004_e.pdf.

A full list of Historic Sites and Monuments (HSMs) can be found on the ATS website at

https://www.ats.aq/documents/recatt/att596_e.pdf.

Further Visitor Site Guidelines can be found on the ATS website at

https://www.ats.aq/devAS/ats_other_siteguidelines.aspx?lang=e

Additional information can also be found on the IAATO website at

<https://iaato.org/guidelines-and-resources>

You should provide details of how you will ensure all members of the expedition abide by management plans and guidance which apply to sites the expedition intends to visit.

Question 6.2 – If you are not sure if a site you intend to visit has been visited before, provide details.

Question 6.3 – Provide detail on any hazardous substances that you intend to take into Antarctica.

Question 6.4 – Provide as much detail on any equipment you intend to install in Antarctica. You can provide information on a separate sheet if required.

Question 6.5 – Provide as much detail as possible if you intend to store fuel within the Antarctic terrestrial environment.

Questions 6.6 – 6.7 - Provide details on the expected amount and arrangements in place for wastes which will be generated

Question 6.8 – Explain how you will ensure you that all activity will comply with current Antarctic environmental legislation, including the [Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty](#).

Question 6.9 – Provide detail on how you will ensure all members of the expedition are aware of their environmental responsibilities. This should include disturbance of wildlife, introduction of non-native species, waste disposal, respecting historic sites and minimising trampling impacts.

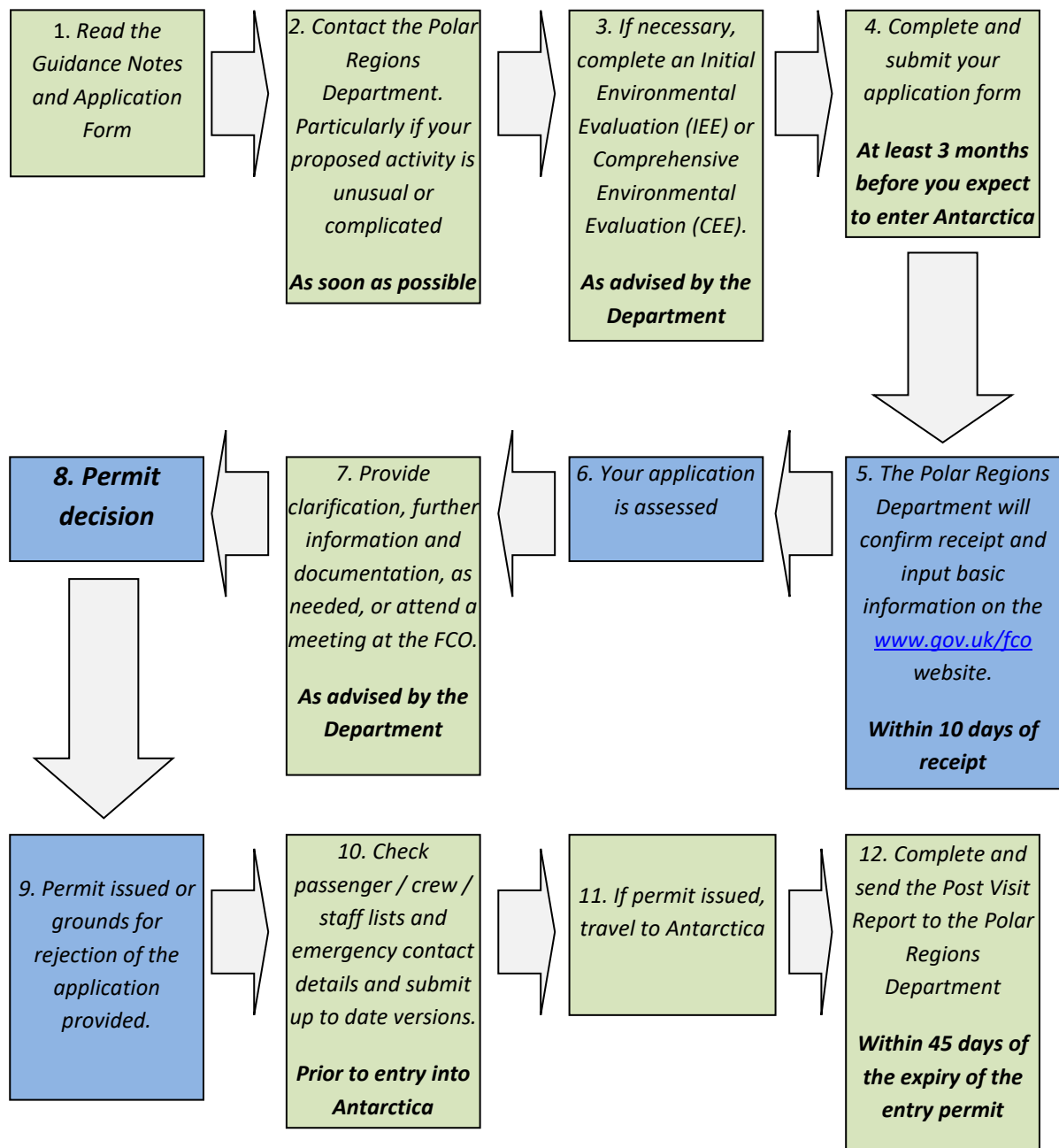
Question 6.10 – Complete the Environment Impact Matrix with each activity you intend to undertake, ensuring you cover the possible impact of that activity on the environment and how it will be mitigated.

You will be expected to familiarise yourself with the environmental legislation in force in Antarctica. Examples include the Antarctic Treaty 1959, the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty 1991, management plans associated with relevant ASPAs and ASMAs, and the Antarctic Act 1994 and the Antarctic Acts 1994 & 2013. These can be found at the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat, BAS or legislation.gov.uk websites.

Part 2 – Application flow chart

The following flow-chart provides an overview of the application, assessment and permit allocation process for those wishing to undertake specialist activities in Antarctica.

Actions to be undertaken by the applicants are shown in green and for the Polar Regions Department in blue.



Part 3 - Frequently asked questions

This section provides answers to the questions most frequently asked by applicants for an Antarctic permit. For further questions, contact details can be found on page 12.

Q. Why do I need a permit to enter Antarctica?

The UK's Antarctic permitting process is designed to protect the unique and fragile natural environment. The application form seeks to establish the necessary information to assess this suitability.

Q. Under what legislation is a permit required?

The Antarctic Act 1994 and the Antarctic Act 2013, together with the Antarctic Regulations 1995 (as amended) implements the environmental provisions of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (also known as the Environmental Protocol or Madrid Protocol), which was agreed in 1991 and entered into force in 1998.

Q. Who needs to complete a Specialist Activities Application form?

The form needs to be completed by UK nationals (or citizens of a British overseas territory) or non-UK nationals on a British expedition who wish to undertake scientific research in Antarctica which involves:

- undertaking activities to kill, injure, capture, handle, molest or disturb native mammals or birds or to remove or potentially damage native plants or invertebrates; or where there is a potential to damage habitats
- undertaking activities that introduce non-native animals, plants or microorganisms;
- undertaking mineral resource activities; and/or
- entering specially protected areas.

Q. I am not a UK national, do I still need a permit?

Possibly, if you are on a British expedition. A British expedition is one organised in the UK, or where the last place of departure for Antarctica is the UK. If in doubt, please contact the Polar Regions Department

Q. I already have a permit from another country – do I still need to apply?

No, providing the permit authorises you for all activities that you are planning to carry out while in Antarctica.

Q. What will happen if I travel to Antarctica without a permit or breach the conditions of the permit whilst in Antarctica?

The Antarctic Act 1994, together with the Antarctic Act 2013 and accompanying Regulations establish criminal offences. Any UK national or non-national on a British expedition who undertakes a specialist activity without either a permit, or written authority from another Contracting Party to the Environmental Protocol, will be guilty of an offence.

Similarly any breach of a condition of a permit is an offence. **The maximum penalty for those found guilty of offences under the Act is two years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.** A permit may also be suspended or revoked.

Q. What are the boundaries of Antarctica for these purposes?

'Antarctica' includes all sea, land and ice-shelves south of 60°S latitude

Q. Can someone else pass me their permit?

No. Permits are not transferable.

Q. Can a permit be issued for more than one year?

Permits will not be issued normally for a period of more than one Antarctic (summer) season, (e.g. November to March).

Q. When should I apply and with whom can I talk to get further information?

You must allow at least three months if you have previously obtained a permit for austral summer activities. It is strongly recommended that you submit your application, or at least make contact with the Department, four to six months prior to your intended date of travel. Please contact the Polar Regions Department as soon as possible to discuss your travel plans. BAS staff should contact the BAS Environment Office.

Q. What will happen if I apply late?

The Polar Regions Department cannot guarantee that permit applications will be fully processed, and, if appropriate, permits issued, if applicants apply without leaving sufficient time for the proposed activity in Antarctica to be assessed. Undertaking specialist activities without a permit is a criminal offence.

Q. What is in the permit and what will I do with it?

The permit will set out the activity you have agreed to undertake and the conditions under which you are allowed to undertake those activities. The permit, or a good quality copy, must be carried with you while in Antarctica and must be produced if requested to do so.

Q. Is there anything I need to do once I return from Antarctica?

Once you return from Antarctica you will need to complete a Post-Visit Report within 45 days of the expiry of your permit. This short report provides straightforward information on how the visit to Antarctica was carried out and enables the Polar Regions Department to meet its international obligations under the Antarctic Treaty and to evaluate and improve its service.

Q. Will any other permits be required?

You will need to be covered by a permit or authorisation from another Antarctic Treaty Party to enter Antarctica. You may also need a further special permit if your activity in Antarctica involves:

- staying on a British research station;
- operating a British vessel, or aircraft within Antarctica; or
- Conservation of a Historic Site or Monument.

Please contact the Polar Regions Department as soon as possible if any of these activities apply.

Q. What will happen to the information I provide in the application form?

Within 10 days from the confirmation of receipt of an application, basic details will be published on the GOV.UK website in accordance with regulation 4(2) of the Antarctic Regulations 1995 as amended. While an application is being assessed the applicant must make a copy available for inspection or provide a copy to any person who requests it in writing, subject to reasonable charges. The UK will also exchange information about visitor activity in Antarctica as and where necessary, in particular if there are potential implications for other Parties to the Antarctic Treaty. The FCO will treat the information you provide in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation. Our Privacy Notice can be found [here](#).

Q. What can I do if my application is not accepted?

The Polar Regions Department will work with you to resolve any difficulties in relation to your application. However, in the event that the provisions of the Antarctic Act and accompanying Regulations cannot be met, then the Department must decline the request to issue a permit. Under the provisions of the Antarctic Regulations 1995/490 you may have grounds to appeal against that decision and the Polar Regions Department will provide you with more details of this provision at the time of the decision.

Part 4 – Useful links and resources

This section provides a range of links and resources which may assist with the completion of the Application form and your visit to Antarctica.

UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office – Antarctic pages:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visits-to-antarctica-how-to-apply-for-a-permit>

Antarctic Treaty Secretariat:

https://www.ats.aq/index_e.html

Yacht guidance:

http://www.ats.aq/documents/ATCM35/ww/atcm35_ww005_e.pdf

Link to the list of ASPAs, ASMAs and HSM pages on the ATS website:

<https://www.ats.aq/e/protected.html>

Link to Visitor Site Guidelines page of ATS website:

<https://www.ats.aq/devAS/Ats/VisitorSiteGuidelines?lang=e>

International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators:

<http://iaato.org/home>

IAATO has produced guidelines for boat, clothing and equipment decontamination appropriate for small boat landing operations. It can be downloaded from

<http://iaato.org/decontamination-guidelines>

Wildlife Awareness Manual (2nd Edition) – C.M. Harris (2021). Available from:

<http://www.era.gs/resources/wam/index.shtml>

Please note some details relating to environmental protection have been updated since publication and should be verified

COMNAP Non-Native Species Voluntary Checklists

<http://comnap.mammothweb.co.nz/home/non-native-species-voluntary-checklists/>

SCAR Codes of Conduct for governing fieldwork and the use of animals in Antarctica

<https://www.scar.org/policy/scar-codes-of-conduct/>

Part 5 – Contact information

You may be invited to discuss your application with the Polar Regions Department prior to completing your application. It is recommended that you contact the Department as early as possible in the planning of your visit to Antarctica, particularly if the activity is unusual or complicated. Contact details are as follows:

Telephone – 0207 008 1639 or 0207 008 2616

E-Mail – polarregions@fco.gov.uk

Address – Polar Regions Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Room K2.55
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Failure to discuss your proposed activity with the Department or to submit an application in time may result in the Department being unable to assess your application and issue a permit.