

Buyer's Inspection Guide

Inspection Process Overview

What gets inspected, what doesn't, how to read the report, and how to negotiate findings without losing the deal — or leaving money on the table.

Western Washington | General Inspection & Form 35R Strategy

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Why the Inspection Period Matters So Much

In a Washington real estate transaction, the inspection period is your primary opportunity to fully evaluate the property before you're legally committed to buy it. Under the standard purchase and sale agreement, you have a defined number of days (typically 10, negotiated at offer) to conduct inspections and decide whether to proceed, negotiate, or terminate.

Miss a deadline or skip an inspection, and you may waive important rights. Rush through it, and you may close on a property with costly surprises. Approach it strategically, and the inspection becomes one of your most powerful negotiating tools.

"The inspection period is not just about discovering problems. It's about making a fully informed decision — with or without those problems."

Types of Inspections — What to Order

General Home Inspection

The foundation of every inspection period. A licensed inspector evaluates the structure, roof, foundation, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, windows, and more. This takes 2–4 hours and produces a detailed written report. Plan to attend. Cost: typically \$450–\$650 in western Washington.

Sewer Scope

A camera is inserted into the main sewer line to check for breaks, root intrusion, bellying, or blockages. Strongly recommended for any home with older galvanized or clay pipes, or any home over 20 years old. Skipping this is one of the most common and costly mistakes buyers make. Cost: typically \$150–\$250.

Radon Testing

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that's a leading cause of lung cancer. It's odorless, colorless, and common in western Washington. A 48-hour test is left in the home. If levels exceed 4.0 pCi/L, mitigation is required. Cost: \$150–\$200.

Septic Inspection

Required for properties on private septic systems. An inspector locates the tank and drain field, pumps the tank, and evaluates the system. Critical in rural Snohomish, Skagit, and rural King County transactions. Cost: \$300–\$600+.

Well Inspection & Water Quality Test

For properties on private wells: assess pump, pressure tank, and flow rate. A water quality test checks for coliform bacteria, nitrates, and other contaminants. Some lenders require this. Cost: \$200–\$400.

Chimney / Fireplace Inspection

A Level II inspection examines the flue, firebox, cap, and clearances. Recommended for any property with a wood-burning fireplace or insert. Cost: \$150–\$300.

Oil Tank Scan

Underground oil storage tanks (USTs) are common in older western WA homes that used oil heat. A scan detects buried tanks using electromagnetic equipment. If found, further testing and potentially expensive remediation may be required. Cost: \$175–\$300.

Structural Engineering Consult

If the general inspector raises concerns about foundation, framing, or seismic retrofitting, a structural engineer provides a professional opinion and often a remediation cost estimate. Cost: \$500–\$1,500+.

What Inspectors Do NOT Inspect

A general home inspection covers accessible and visible components. It is not exhaustive. Inspectors are not required to inspect:

- Areas that are inaccessible (crawlspaces blocked by debris, attics without safe access, areas hidden behind finishes or furniture).
- Underground systems not visible from the surface (septic drain fields, buried oil tanks) — these require specialty inspections.
- Environmental hazards beyond visible mold (asbestos, lead paint require separate testing).
- Code compliance — inspectors note concerns but don't perform code inspections.
- Security systems, swimming pools beyond basic visual check, or solar system wiring beyond general panel review.
- Things that work intermittently — if the furnace fires up during the inspection, the inspector marks it functional.

PRO TIP: Ask your inspector what they specifically did and didn't evaluate. A good inspector tells you what they couldn't access and recommends specialists.

Reading the Inspection Report

Inspection reports can run 50–100+ pages and include hundreds of items. Here's how to navigate them strategically:

Safety Items First

Anything flagged as a safety concern — carbon monoxide, electrical hazards, structural risk — should be addressed regardless of cost. These are non-negotiable.

Major Systems vs. Cosmetic Items

A cracked foundation, failed sewer line, or failed roof is fundamentally different from peeling paint or a sticky door. Focus on items that affect the structure, livability, or major systems.

Age & Deferred Maintenance

A 20-year-old furnace that works today may fail next winter. These items inform your reserve planning, not necessarily your negotiation.

Inspector Recommendations vs. Urgency

Inspectors say 'recommend evaluation by a licensed professional' frequently. Pay attention to what they flag as immediately deficient vs. something to monitor.

Negotiating Findings — The Form 35 & 35R Process

In western Washington transactions, buyers use the Form 35 (Inspection Addendum) and Form 35R (Response to Inspection) to negotiate after inspections. Here's how it works:

Step	Form	What Happens
1	Form 35 (Buyer's Notice)	Buyer submits written notice of unsatisfactory conditions and what they want: repairs, credits
2	Form 35R (Seller's Response)	Seller responds: agree to buyer's terms, propose alternative resolution, or reject the request.
3	Buyer's Decision	If seller doesn't fully agree, buyer can accept the counter, continue negotiating, or terminate
4	Form 35 Amended	If agreement is reached, terms are documented in writing and signed by all parties before the

Negotiation Strategy: What to Ask For and What to Drop

Always negotiate: Safety hazards

Carbon monoxide alarms, electrical panels with recall issues, exposed wiring, failed smoke detectors, and gas leaks are non-negotiable safety items.

Always negotiate: Active water intrusion

Current leaks, wet crawlspace, or evidence of ongoing moisture damage. These worsen and can indicate mold or structural damage if ignored.

Negotiate strategically: Major system failures

Failed HVAC, failed water heater, failed roof — these have a clear cost and are reasonable to request a credit or verified repair for.

Consider dropping: Deferred maintenance

Gutters full of debris, minor caulking gaps, normal wear items — in a competitive market, asking for cosmetic items can insult sellers and kill deals.

Always get in writing: Agreed repairs

Any repair the seller agrees to must be documented on Form 35R and completed by a licensed contractor, with documentation provided before closing.

"Credits are almost always better than repairs. A seller-performed repair is rarely done to the same standard as one you hire yourself after closing."