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## PRE-PURCHASE BUILDING INSPECTIONS

### **Who** performs building inspections?

Building inspectors typically have backgrounds in construction, engineering, and/or architecture. There are differences of opinion as to which background best qualifies an inspector. In Washington, there is no licensing, certification or registration requirement for building inspectors, other than pest inspectors. Thus, unlike most other professions, there are no education or experience requirements, no examinations, no bonding or insurance requirements, no agency supervision or enforcement, and no uniform format for inspection reports. As a result, there is a great disparity in the practices and competency of building inspectors.

### **How** much does a building inspection cost?

The cost of a building inspection varies greatly from inspector to inspector, but typically runs from \$250 to \$600 for an average house. The cost also varies depending on the size and type of the house, and the scope of the items covered in the inspection.

### **What** is a pre-purchase building inspection?

The scope of a building inspection varies from inspector to inspector, but typically includes the structural, mechanical, plumbing, electrical, heating, ventilating, and air conditioning components, systems, and fixtures, and built-in appliances. In Western Washington, the most common major problems discovered through a building inspection relate to water leakage and seepage, pest infestation, and dry rot. Building inspections generally do not include potentially harmful materials, such as asbestos, urea-formaldehyde, radon, or lead-based paint. The scope of the inspection is also limited by the lack of accessibility to hidden areas and the inspector's own expertise. Pre-purchase building inspections are limited to visible areas of the improvements, and do not include destruction or intrusive testing. As a result, building inspections sometimes only reveal the symptoms of a problem, but not its source. Likewise, building inspections do not always reveal the extent of a problem. If a building inspector discovers a problem beyond the scope of the inspection or the inspector's expertise, the inspector will often recommend that the purchaser consult a specialist, such as an engineer, roofer, pest inspector, or testing laboratory.

### **Why** obtain a pre-purchase building inspection?

The primary purpose of a building inspection is to obtain information concerning defects and/or deferred maintenance that may not be visible to a layperson or known to the seller or real estate broker. Prospective purchasers should not rely upon city or county building permit inspections, the purpose of which is to assure minimum compliance with building codes. Likewise, prospective purchasers should not rely upon the lender to require desired inspections, since the lender is only concerned with making sure that it has adequate collateral as security for its loan. If a prospective purchaser has any concerns about the condition of the improvements, the purchaser should obtain a building inspection.

### **When** should a building inspection be obtained?

There is no legal requirement that a seller provide or pay for a building inspection. If a prospective purchase wants a building inspection, then an inspection contingency should be included in the earnest

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money agreement as part of the purchaser's offer. Customarily, the purchaser selects and pays the inspector. Most commonly-used inspection contingencies give the purchaser a certain number of days within which to obtain the desired inspections. If the purchaser objects to any of the conditions identified by the inspector, which the inspector recommends be corrected, then the purchaser must give the seller an opportunity to agree to make the corrections. If the seller is not willing to make the corrections recommended by the inspector, then the purchaser may withdraw from the transaction without liability and the earnest money is refunded to the purchaser.

**Where** can a purchaser find a qualified building inspector?

The best way to find a qualified building inspector is through a referral from a real estate broker or salesperson. Brokers and salespersons are in the best position to be familiar with the qualifications and reputation of various building inspectors.

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