

Seattle's wet winters and spring squalls test every seam in a house. Nowhere is that more obvious than around windows and doors. The trim that frames them and the siding that ties into them are a home's armor, and those junctures take the brunt of wind-driven rain. When the details are right, you get decades of quiet performance. When they're wrong, you get swollen trim boards, peeling paint, and the slow creep of dry rot that hides under caulk lines until it is chewing through sheathing.

I have opened up dozens of walls in the Puget Sound area that looked fine from the sidewalk and found blackened OSB beneath. The common denominator is almost always failed flashing or careless detailing where siding meets openings. If you are weighing Trim and siding repair, or you need a dry rot repair contractor to diagnose soft spots, it helps to understand how water actually moves through those layers, and why repairing around windows and doors is different from patching a random siding panel on a field wall.

Why windows and doors are leak magnets in our climate

Seattle sees rain on more than 150 days a year, with long stretches of mist and intermittent bursts that push water horizontally. Add wind coming off the Sound, and water works its way behind cladding anywhere it finds a gap. Windows and doors break the drainage plane that runs behind your siding. Every opening is an interruption in the weather-resistive barrier, so it depends on meticulous sequencing of flashing tapes, pans, and trims. If any piece is backward or skipped, capillary action pulls moisture inward.

You can think of a window or door surround as a small roof system squeezed into a vertical wall. There is a sill that needs to drain, a head that needs to shed water, and jambs that need to escort water down and out. When painters or handymen keep adding caulk to the perimeter every few years, it can mask problems, but it also traps water. In Seattle, the safer assumption is that water will get in at least a little. The job is to design repairs so that it can get back out.

Symptoms that mean more than a paint job

Exterior trim repair usually begins with a visual cue you notice while mowing the lawn or washing windows. Paint is bubbling at the bottom of a window, one corner of a door casing has gone punky, or the lower edge of a cedar clapboard feels soft under your finger. Those are small signals of a bigger story.

On fiber cement, subtle clues include hairline cracks at fastener heads near openings or a persistent dark stain under a sill nose after rain. On cedar or fir trim, look for mushrooming at end grain, miters that have opened, and caulk joints that won't hold a bead. Inside the home, fogged insulated glass, a musty smell near a window seat, or a baseboard that bows can point back to the same failure. If the exterior looks tired around openings, a Seattle dry rot inspection is worth the fee, because a moisture meter and a few test holes can prevent you from chasing cosmetics while the sheathing rots behind.

The hierarchy of repair: from cosmetic to structural

Not every siding repair Seattle homeowners need requires full replacement. Some cases are cleanly limited to trim boards. Others demand reframing a rough opening. The trick is to read the clues, probe carefully, and stop guessing as soon as your knife pushes through sound wood into mush.

Here is how I typically triage repairs around windows and doors:

- **Surface-only issues:** sound substrate, failing paint, and brittle caulk. This is repaint territory, but only after opening joints enough to dry, back-priming cuts, and using a high-quality elastomeric caulk sparingly so future repairs are not sealed off from drainage.
- **Localized trim failure:** the lower 6 to 12 inches of side casings or the sill nose is soft. Replace only the affected pieces, but take the opportunity to correct flashing sequencing at the corners. If trim is cellular PVC or fiber cement, use compatible fasteners and sealants.
- **Siding panel or course damage:** the bottom courses or adjacent panel siding are swelling near the opening. Remove and replace the nearby siding, check WRB integrity, and add kick-out or diverter details as you reassemble.
- **Hidden sheathing rot:** moisture readings above 20 percent, or a screwdriver sinks behind the WRB near the jamb. Remove more cladding, replace rotten sheathing, and improve flashing. At this level, consider whether Siding replacement services Seattle WA may provide better value than piecemeal patches.

- Framing compromised: sill or trimmer studs are decayed, the window or door is out of square, or you see fungal growth. This is full remediation, including reframing the opening and reinstalling the unit with a pan, proper head flashing, and new WRB tie-ins.

That list reads simple, but the decisions can be nuanced. For example, if you have a historically detailed Craftsman with fir trim and a deep sill, replacing only the sill nose may preserve original fabric while still ending the leak, but only if you can add a metal sill pan beneath without telegraphing a modern edge. That kind of judgment call benefits from siding contractors in Seattle who know the local building stock.

Working materials: wood, fiber cement, and composites

Around windows and doors in Seattle, the big three are wood, fiber cement, and PVC/composite trims. Each behaves differently in our climate and repairs demand specific techniques.

Wood trim, especially vertical-grain cedar and fir, looks right on Seattle's older homes. It also moves with moisture, which makes crisp miters hard to keep tight. When rot sets in at the lower ends, you can often sister in a dutchman repair on a stile, but if the wood fibers are discolored two inches or more beyond the punky area, replacement is better. Back-priming cut edges is not optional. On cedar siding, replace damaged clapboards by cutting back to the nearest stud, using a scarf joint with waterproof glue, then priming all cuts before reinstallation.

Fiber cement trim and siding are common on newer builds. They shrug off moisture but rely on correct clearances at window sills and heads. Problems typically come from sloppy nail placement or backwards flashing. When repairing, use corrosion-resistant nails, seal penetrations, and respect the [dry rot repair](#) 1/4 to 3/8 inch gap at joints so caulk can flex. For lap, maintain the 2 inch clearance above roofing and flashing and 6 inches above grade, then stick to manufacturer patterns so your warranty remains intact.

Cellular PVC and composite trims don't rot, but they expand and contract notably with temperature. Long runs need scarf joints and mechanical fastening in addition to adhesive. Sealant choice matters. Many silicones will not bond well; polyurethane or adhesive/sealants rated for PVC do better. If you are doing House trim repair with mixed materials, isolate dissimilar materials with flashing tape or a thin break so surfaces don't abrade each other over time.

Flashing is the repair, not the trim

Every successful exterior trim repair around an opening starts with one premise: flashing is the water management system, trim is just the armor. I have taken off immaculate paint-grade trim and found the WRB cut and taped in ways that channeled water inward. To avoid that, follow the shingle principle religiously. Lower layers installed first, upper layers lapped over them, and every joint pushes water to the exterior.

A sound repair sequence goes like this. Strip away the failing trim and a perimeter of siding around the window or door, usually 6 to 12 inches. Protect the opening with plastic if rain is expected. Inspect the sill and lower corners with a moisture meter and a small chisel. If the sheathing is soft, widen the removal. Once you are back to solid material, install or repair the sill pan. In Seattle I prefer a rigid pan with end dams that directs water out. If budget or conditions dictate fluid-applied or peel-and-stick pans, create an upturned back dam at the interior edge to prevent inward flow.

Next, integrate the pan into the WRB. On older homes with asphalt felt, insert the pan's back leg under the felt and lap the side jamb flashings over, not under. On newer homes with housewrap, cut and temporarily lift the head flap, then tape the jambs down the wall so they terminate at the pan. Only after jambs are correct should you reattach the head flap and add a head flashing that extends past the trim edges. A rigid metal head flashing with at least a small drip edge outperforms relying on caulk. Once the WRB is shingled correctly, re-install or replace the window or door trim, leaving deliberate gaps for sealant where required and back-priming every cut.

This is not glamour work, but it is why a dry rot repair contractor will often recommend removing more material than a homeowner expects. You are buying drainage, not just fresh wood.

When to repair, when to replace the unit

A window can be structurally sound and still leak because the surrounding details are wrong. In many Seattle projects, keeping the unit and correcting the flashing is sufficient. Replace the unit only when one of three conditions is present. First, the frame itself is decayed or out [Learn more here](#) of square. Second, the insulated glass is failed and the sash is

no longer supported well enough to justify reglazing. Third, the original installation omitted any meaningful pan or jamb flashing and the interior shows a long history of leaks.

Anecdotally, I recently worked on a 1990s house in Ballard with vinyl windows that looked fine. The problem was a lack of sill pans and nails through the lower flanges. Three openings had moisture readings above 25 percent at the lower corners. We removed the bottom courses of siding, cut out a strip of sheathing to rebuild the sill, installed custom metal pans, and reassembled with new fiber cement trim. The units stayed, and two years later the paint still looks crisp and the meter reads 12 to 15 percent after heavy rain. Good repair work around existing units is often the most cost-effective path.

Conversely, a 1920s Craftsman in Beacon Hill had original wood windows, beautiful but neglected. The head flashing was simply a bead of old putty and the sills were cupped. In that case, the owner chose restoration carpentry for the windows and full seattle trim repair with copper head flashings, plus new cedar siding at the bump-out. That hybrid approach retained character and now actually sheds water.

Managing transitions and tricky details

Some of the worst leaks occur at intersections that don't look dramatic at first glance.

- **Door thresholds and stoops:** When a stoop or deck is level with a threshold, water can sit against the lower trim and wick inward. The fix often involves lowering the deck, adding a metal threshold pan that turns up at the interior, and creating at least a small gap with a sloped sill extension. The temptation to caulk the joint tight is strong, but a capillary break is more effective long-term.
- **Head returns on thick trim:** Deep returns create little cradles for water. If you can, bevel the top of returns slightly and add a kerf drip under the nose so water falls clear.
- **Flanged windows with rigid foam:** If the wall has exterior foam, flashing has to extend out to the plane of the siding so the head flashing actually projects. Metal Z-flashing custom bent to match the foam thickness solves this, but it requires planning when you open the wall.
- **Kick-out flashing and nearby roofs:** Where a small roof dumps water against a wall near a window, install a kick-out flashing at the end of the roof-to-wall step flashing. It diverts water into the gutter and saves the siding course near the opening. I have gone back to homes where the only change was adding a proper kick-out, and the stain below the window disappeared within a season as the wall dried.

These are judgment calls that separate a tidy-looking repair from one that will last through a decade of Seattle weather.

Choosing help: what to ask a contractor

There are many siding contractors Seattle WA homeowners can call, but not all specialize in forensic repair around openings. When you interview siding contractors in Seattle, ask to see photos of their repairs mid-process, not just finished facades. Look for evidence of sill pans, head flashings that project beyond trim, and WRB integration. Ask how they perform a Seattle dry rot inspection. Do they use moisture meters, or do they only bid from the curb? Clarify whether they will handle repainting and color-matching or coordinate with a painter.

If the scope is modest, an experienced carpenter can handle exterior trim repair with solid results. If the moisture damage extends across elevations, or you see signs of systemic errors like no head flashings on any windows, Siding replacement services Seattle WA will often save money by addressing every weak link at once. It is common for small patches to reveal wider failure on 1990s and early 2000s constructions when building wraps and flashings were not consistently installed.

Cost, timelines, and living through the work

Pricing varies with access, height, and how much hidden damage appears once you open the wall. As a rough frame, expect a simple House trim repair around one window with no sheathing damage to run a few hundred dollars in materials and a day of labor. Add a day if you are switching to PVC trim and need to glue joints and pin nail carefully, or if paint matching is fussy.

When dry rot repair Seattle projects involve sheathing and framing, the cost can climb quickly because you are buying diagnosis and protection as much as visible materials. Rebuilding one opening with new sheathing, a rigid sill pan, jamb

flashings, and trim typically takes two to three days for a two-person crew, plus drying time if you use fluid-applied membranes. Multiplying that across a façade becomes a strategic decision: repair the worst now and plan a phased Seattle dry rot repair, or bundle the work and negotiate better pricing for a whole elevation.

Homeowners can expect some noise, plastic protection around interior trim if units are replaced, and a window or door out of service during parts of the day. Good siding repair Seattle crews stage the work so openings are weather-tight each evening.

Maintenance that actually extends life

Once the flashing is right, a few habits keep it working. Keep an eye on the lower corners of trim and the head returns. If a caulk joint cracks, remove the entire bead instead of smearing new over old. Touch up paint on end grain cuts annually for wood trim. Clean gutters so head flashings can do their job instead of handling waterfall loads in a storm. Avoid aggressive pressure washing; it drives water behind siding. Use a garden hose and a soft brush to clean mildew. If you have shrubs against the house, prune to maintain airflow around lower trim.

I advise clients to schedule a light checkup every spring. Walk the perimeter after a week of rain. Look for persistent damp spots, peeling paint at lower casings, and stains beneath head flashings. If anything looks suspect, call for a quick inspection before summer projects begin. Seattle trim repair goes faster in dry weather, but the planning starts when problems are visible.

A realistic DIY path and where to stop

A skilled homeowner can handle minor trim swaps and even replace a few courses of lap siding near a window. The keys are patience and respect for sequencing. If you are taking on a small exterior trim repair, buy the right flashing tapes, read the window manufacturer's installation guide, and mock up the layers on a sawhorse before you cut into the wall. Take more photos than you think you need as you disassemble so you can retrace your steps.

Stop and call a pro when your probe finds rot behind the WRB, the window or door is out of square, or the wall assembly includes unfamiliar layers like exterior foam or rain-screen battens. Bringing in a dry rot repair contractor at that moment usually prevents doubling your work.

Seattle specifics that change the game

Our codes and common practices tilt toward tighter buildings than older regions, which means when water gets in, it dries more slowly. Many Seattle homes now have rain-screen assemblies with furring between the WRB and siding. If you cut into one, maintain the cavity continuity during repairs. The rain-screen is your friend; it allows a small leak to dissipate instead of soaking in. If your house predates rain-screen details, you can often introduce a localized cavity during a repair. A thin furring strip and a vented trim detail can create just enough airflow to change outcomes around a leaky window.

Another Seattle quirk is mixed cladding. You see stucco panels meeting fiber cement or cedar around bays. Those transitions deserve special attention, especially where stucco dead-ends into trim. If you are opening that joint, add a weep screed or a small back-drained break so water in the stucco field cannot push into the trim.

Finally, coastal exposures along Alki or Magnolia get salt air and harsher wind. In those pockets, upgrade fasteners to stainless for fiber cement and use thicker gauge head flashings with a crisp drip edge. The difference shows up five years later when you are not dealing with rust streaks and lifted nails.

The value of doing it once, and doing it right

Siding repair around windows and doors is detail work. It is easy to make it look finished and still leave the core problem untouched. The payoff for careful sequencing, properly lapped WRB and flashings, and materials matched to Seattle's climate is measured in quiet seasons where paint and caulk hold, thresholds stay dry, and your heating bill does not spike due to hidden moisture in the walls.

Whether you hire siding contractors Seattle WA relies on for full façade work or a specialist for targeted Seattle dry rot repair, ask to see the layers, not just the face. The best crews are proud of their pans and tapes. They know that the trim is what you photograph, but the flashing is what makes it through February.

If you have been living with spongy trim at a back door or a recurring stain below a picture window, do not wait until next summer. Water moves in winter, and repairs made now stop the rot line from expanding. Start with a Seattle dry rot inspection, choose a team that treats flashing as the main event, and insist on details that match your home's materials. Done right, you will not have to think about that window or door again for a very long time.

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