

Dry rot eats quietly. It finds a damp corner behind a leaky window, a poorly flashed deck ledger, or a clogged downspout. In our maritime climate, fungi get ideal conditions to colonize framing, sheathing, and exterior trim. By the time a homeowner notices spongy siding or a soft window sill, damage inside the wall can already be significant. Choosing the right dry rot repair contractor in Seattle is not just about price, it is about competence, risk management, and lasting work. Credentials become a shorthand for the skills and systems that protect your home.

This is a practical field guide, written from years of crawling under porches, opening up wavy walls, and discovering why a handsome paint job failed after two winters. The goal is to help you evaluate siding contractors in Seattle WA and select a team that can diagnose, repair, and prevent dry rot, not just cover it up.

Why Seattle homes are vulnerable

Seattle sits in a narrow band of temperate rainforest, which sounds charming until you consider what it means for wood. We get long wet seasons, wind-driven rain, and frequent freeze-thaw cycles in the foothills. Houses breathe, but not always well. Water finds paths through missing kickout flashing, diverter-free roofs, inadequate [dry rot repair](#) clearances at grade, and high-pressure washing that drives moisture up behind lap siding. Modern tight homes can trap that moisture if ventilation is poor. Older homes, especially pre-1978, often have layered remodels and orphaned flashings that allow water to linger.

It takes three elements for dry rot fungi to flourish: wood, moisture, and time. Temperature helps, but moisture is the lever you can control. A skilled dry rot repair contractor understands Seattle's weather patterns and the specific details that fail here, from unprimed end cuts on cedar to fiber cement butt joints without proper gapping. That local pattern recognition is a credential in itself.

Inspection is not guesswork

You cannot fix what you cannot see. A proper Seattle dry rot inspection starts with a hypothesis about how water is entering, followed by a systematic check that confirms or disproves it. On a typical 1950s rambler in Wedgwood, I will begin at the roof-wall intersections, corners, and penetrations. I carry a pin-type moisture meter, a non-invasive meter for initial sweeps, and a sharp awl. If a meter reads high variability at a window bottom corner, I test with the awl on paint bubbles, checking for punky wood or delamination. Infrared cameras can help after a rain, but they are not magic wands, they show temperature differences that may correlate to moisture.

On homes with tight plank siding and aluminum windows from the 70s, I check the head and sill flashings for continuity and slope. On Craftsman homes with wide rakes, I look for split fascia and open miters that wick water back. Decks attached to siding are serial offenders, especially when the ledger lacks a continuous flashing behind the siding. Basements with grade close to the siding usually reveal the telltale mushrooming of OSB sheathing at the bottom edge.

An honest inspector opens at least one suspect area. Probing alone can mislead. I still remember a Queen Anne rental where the windows looked fine and the trim seemed solid. Pulling the first piece of exterior trim revealed blackened studs and an ant colony, all from a pinhole in an old storm window fastener. The owner had passed on an invasive look for years. The eventual structural repair cost five times more than basic trim and siding repair would have when the first paint failure appeared.

Licensing, bonding, insurance: the non-negotiables

In Washington state, residential contractors must hold an active registration with the Department of Labor and Industries. That registration does not testify to skill, but it ensures the contractor is legal, bonded, and insured. Ask for the company name exactly as registered, then verify it on the L&I website. Look for active status, bond and insurance on file, and whether there are outstanding infractions.

General liability insurance should be measured in millions, not thousands, considering the potential for mold claims and water damage. If a worker punctures a plumbing line while opening a wall, you want to know the company, not you, will fund the remediation. Workers' compensation coverage protects you from injury claims on your property. If you are considering siding replacement services Seattle WA that will involve ladders and scaffolds, coverage is more than a checkbox, it is a shield.

Bonding is limited in payout, but its existence signals that the business expects and plans for potential financial disputes. Some homeowners ask for proof once and never again. Better practice is to request a current certificate directly from the insurer, not a photocopy shoved across a truck tailgate.

Manufacturer certifications and what they really mean

Contractors love to list badges. Some matter, others are marketing. For siding contractors in Seattle, the certifications that carry technical training and warranty leverage include James Hardie's Alliance programs, LP SmartSide preferred installers, and for windows, manufacturer-authorized installers like Milgard or Andersen. These programs often require proof of proper methods for flashing, gapping, fastener types, and finishing.

Here is why certification matters in dry rot work. Much of Seattle dry rot repair involves removing and reinstalling cladding around windows, doors, and deck ledgers. Flashing details must follow manufacturer specs to keep warranties intact. A crew fluent in Hardie or LP details is less likely to skip pan flashings or reverse lap a WRB. That fluency shows when they resolve an atypical corner or transition rather than improvising with a smear of sealant.

That said, a badge does not substitute for field references. I have met certified installers who struggled with mid-project problem solving, and mavericks who could teach the manufacturer's trainers a thing or two. The ideal is both certification and a portfolio of jobs in neighborhoods like yours, in similar exposures.

The scope is more than a line item for "dry rot repair"

A tidy bid that says "dry rot repair at windows - 6 units" may be worse than no bid at all. You need clarity on what is included and how unknowns will be handled. Dry rot repair Seattle projects always hold surprises. The contractor's process for discovery and change orders makes the difference between a controlled job and a budget spiral.

A robust scope will spell out how many linear feet of siding removal is assumed, the type and thickness of sheathing expected, whether WRB replacement is included, the flashing materials by brand and gauge, priming and sealing of cut edges, back caulking approach, and paint touch-up or full repaint. It will describe how the crew will sequence work to keep the building dry overnight. If the job involves house trim repair or exterior trim repair only, the scope should still call for moisture testing before buttoning up. Rot does not stop at the edge of the piece you can see.

For projects labeled "siding repair Seattle," pay attention to transitions between new and old. Painting a patch to match can hide the fact that the old siding has marginal clearances to grade or near a roof. You do not want a pretty patch in a failing system. A contractor who proposes limited repairs and explains the risks of piecemeal work is being candid, not evasive. Sometimes siding replacement services Seattle WA that address continuous runs of compromised material cost less over five years than repeated spot fixes.

The science behind the fix

Dry rot is not a stain to be bleached away. Each repair should aim at moisture management first, material durability second, and maintenance planning third. On the moisture front, I expect to see kickout flashings at roof-to-wall junctures, pan and head flashings at fenestrations, flexible flashing tapes applied shingle-style with the WRB, and an understanding of rainscreen gaps where appropriate. Even when the code does not demand a ventilated rainscreen, a 3 to 6 millimeter drainage mat behind siding can mean the difference between seasonal dampness and chronic wet.

Material choices matter in Seattle. Cedar trim looks beautiful but rots fast when end grain sits on a wet surface. If you want wood, specify vertical grain, prime all six sides, and seal end cuts in the field. Many contractors prefer engineered trim for predictable performance. For exposed kick boards or near-grade trims, fiber cement or cellular PVC earns its keep. For lap siding, fiber cement with correct gapping and flashing outlasts many alternatives, though LP SmartSide has good impact resistance and installs faster in winter. Whatever the choice, vent paths and capillary breaks are your real insurance.

I have seen homeowners insist on caulking every butt joint on fiber cement. It looks neat on day one, then it cracks and traps water. Proper gapping and flashing behind the joint is the correct method. The details that prevent rot are invisible when done right.

Permits, inspections, and when to involve the city

Seattle's permitting for repair work can be straightforward, but it depends on scope. Replacing like for like on exterior finishes often does not require a permit. Structural repairs do. If rot has compromised studs, rim joists, or shear walls, a permit and sometimes an engineer are involved. A serious dry rot repair contractor will not guess on structural capacity or shear nailing patterns. They will document what they find, propose a fix that meets code, and submit for review when needed.

Pulling a permit is not a burden, it is a record that work was done correctly. When you sell, a history of permitted structural repair beats a series of ambiguous contractor invoices. Also, if you are in a historic district or working on a landmark property, additional reviews apply. Good contractors know those channels and timelines.

Safety and cleanup standards

Dry rot work generates dust and debris. On pre-1978 homes, lead-safe practices are mandatory when disturbing painted surfaces. Ask the contractor about EPA RRP certification and how they set containment. I expect to see plastic barriers, HEPA vacuums, and surface protection inside if interior access is needed. Outside, debris chutes, magnet sweeps for fasteners, and daily cleanup keep the site livable.

Moist Seattle winters demand weather plans. A crew that opens a wall at 9 a.m. should have a path to dry-in by afternoon, with tarps staged and sheathing ready. If there is any chance of rain, they work in smaller sections. This is where experience shows. I have watched inexperienced crews chase rain across an elevation and then spend the next week fixing their own water damage.

Pricing that actually predicts cost

Bids come in three flavors in this niche: time and materials, fixed price with allowances, and hybrid. Pure fixed price rarely fits because you cannot see all the damage at the estimate stage. Time and materials can feel open-ended. The best approach is a fixed price for the known scope, with unit pricing for unknowns. For example, the contract might include removal and replacement of 200 square feet of siding around each window, plus a per-linear-foot rate for additional framing repairs discovered.

Ask how the contractor documents additional work. Photos with a tape measure in frame, daily logs, and updated moisture readings build trust. It also helps to set a contingency budget at the start, typically 10 to 25 percent depending on the age of the home and the symptoms. If a contractor cannot explain their pricing structure in plain terms, expect stress later.

References that speak to durability, not just punctuality

Online reviews capture first impressions. For dry rot, you want third-year outcomes. When you ask for references, request at least one project that is two [repair dry rot](#) to four years old and in a similar exposure. Talk to homeowners on the west sides of their houses where rain slams hardest, or on steep lots where wind drives water up under laps. The question is not just whether the crew was tidy, but whether the repair disappeared into the overall system and stayed solid.

A brief anecdote from Capitol Hill sticks with me. We repaired window trim and replaced the WRB around three stacked windows on a stucco-clad wall with cedar accents. The client called two winters later to say the interior paint still looked perfect and the water staining had not returned, which is the only compliment that matters in this trade. Results measured in dry drywall and tight exterior paint are better than any testimonial about friendly crews.

When replacement beats repair

There is a tipping point where trim and siding repair becomes false economy. If you have multiple elevations with widespread mushy sheathing, stains at corners, and wavy siding, sectional fixes will leave you with a patchwork and persistent risk. For certain mid-90s builds with defective WRBs or chronic flashing failures, full reclads with new WRB, flashings, and a drainage plane are the rational choice.

Siding contractors in Seattle who do both repairs and full replacements can advise without bias. They will talk through the cost per square, show how window integration changes in each scenario, and help you plan phasing if budget requires it. I prefer when homeowners tackle the worst elevation first, especially weather-facing sides, then plan the rest within 12 to 24 months. It is better to have one stable, fully integrated wall than four walls temporarily patched.

Communication rhythm that keeps surprises in check

Projects go sideways when contractors disappear for days or gloss over findings. The best teams establish a cadence: daily check-ins, weekly look-aheads, and immediate calls on any structural discoveries. On complex seattle trim repair jobs where carpentry intersects with existing finishes, timing matters. Painters need dry windows to prime cut edges the

same day. Window installers need to coordinate with siding removal to preserve flashing continuity. Sequencing only works when everyone talks.

I also advise clients to designate a decision maker who can be reached quickly. When we open a wall and find a rotten king stud, we should not wait 48 hours for direction. Healthy projects make small decisions fast so big decisions remain rare.

What quality looks like on site

You do not need to be a builder to spot good work. Look for primed end cuts on every piece of wood trim before installation. Note whether fasteners are driven flush, not overdriven. At window heads, see if the flashing laps over the WRB correctly, and if flexible flashing tapes are rolled, not just pressed. Check that horizontal trim has a slight slope to shed water and that caulk beads are smooth and sized correctly, not smeared thin.

On fiber cement, proper clearances matter, 6 to 8 inches above grade, 1 to 2 inches above roofs and flat surfaces. Kickout flashings at gutter terminations should be large enough to direct water into the gutter, not into the wall. The crew should stop to address rotten framing when discovered, not bury it under new finish. If you see paint touch-ups used to hide poor carpentry, raise a flag.

The role of maintenance and homeowner habits

Even the best repair fails if water management goes ignored. Clean your gutters twice a year, more if you have firs and cedars nearby. Keep vegetation off the siding to allow airflow. Avoid sprinklers that hit the house. Do not pressure wash lap siding, it drives water into joints. When you see a split in a window sill, do not caulk the crack and forget it, call for an assessment. Small, timely exterior trim repair extends the life of the system.

For homes with complex assemblies like stucco with wood insets or mixed claddings, set a schedule to recheck sealants and flashing terminations every year or two. A 15-minute look can prevent a five-figure repair. Think of it as routine seattle dry rot repair avoidance.

Red flags that should send you back to the shortlist

Use these as quick filters when you interview siding contractors in Seattle:

- Reluctance to perform or document invasive inspection where symptoms point to hidden damage
- Vague proposals without material specifications, flashing details, or moisture management plan
- No proof of current insurance, RRP certification for pre-1978 homes, or Washington L&I registration
- Promise of purely cosmetic fixes where systemic issues are visible, like caulking in place of flashing
- Unwillingness to provide references from similar projects at least two years old

Matching the contractor to the job

Not every company is built for every project. A boutique trim specialist might be perfect for house trim repair around a few historic windows, bringing the right tools and patience for millwork replication. A larger siding company may be better for full elevations, staging, and sequencing multiple trades. If your project includes window replacements within the scope, work with a team that coordinates fenestration, WRB, and siding as a single system. Gaps between trades are where leaks hide.

For small but chronic issues like a repeatedly failing deck-to-wall junction, consider a contractor who will address upstream water sources, not just the rot. That might include reworking a gutter layout, adding diverters, or adjusting slope on a small roof. Sometimes a two-hour sheet metal solution saves you from years of carpentry.

A brief case study: when credentials earned their keep

A Ballard duplex presented with peeling paint around four vinyl windows and one soft sill. The owner had two low bids to replace trim and repaint. Our inspection found elevated moisture readings at every lower left corner, with the highest behind a downspout. We opened two test areas and discovered the WRB lapped behind the head flashing, a classic reverse lap from original construction. The downspout brought more water to a bad detail.

Because our crew was certified with the siding manufacturer, we had warranty-approved methods to correct the laps without replacing the entire wall. We removed siding in bands above and below the windows, cut back the WRB, installed pan flashings, corrected the head laps, added a kickout at the nearby roof return, and reinstalled siding with proper clearances. The owner opted for fiber cement trim to replace failing finger-jointed pine. Final moisture readings dropped to baseline. Three winters later, still dry.

Credentials in that case were not a plaque on the website, they were a path to an approved fix and a manufacturer technical rep who reviewed our plan. That is the practical value you want to buy.

The Seattle-specific checklist for your final decision

You have met a few contractors, reviewed bids, and checked references. Before you sign, align on these final points:

- Clear plan for Seattle dry rot inspection methods and where invasive checks will happen
- Documented scope that addresses moisture paths, not just damaged wood, including flashings, WRB, and end-grain sealing
- Proof of Washington L&I registration, general liability and workers' compensation insurance, and EPA RRP where applicable
- Manufacturer installation certifications relevant to the materials in your project, or documented equivalent experience
- Communication plan for daily updates, change order handling, and weather contingencies

The payoff of choosing well

When dry rot repair is done right, you do not think about it again. Paint lasts longer because the substrate is dry. Interior drywall stays crisp at window corners. Gutters and flashings do their quiet work. Your house breathes, sheds water, and tolerates storms without drama. That outcome stems from a contractor's credentials applied in the field, not just printed on a brochure.

Seattle's climate will keep testing our buildings. With the right partner, you can meet that test with smart detailing, durable materials, and a scope that looks past today's soft spot to the system beneath. Whether you need targeted siding repair Seattle or a more comprehensive reclad, invest first in the diagnostic skill and disciplined methods that real credentials signal. The cost of getting it right is measurable, and so is the cost of living with a disguised leak. The better contractor makes sure you pay only once.

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