

Seattle's climate is kind to moss and hard on wood. Long wet seasons, mild temperatures, and limited drying cycles create perfect conditions for fungal decay. Dry rot, despite the name, needs moisture to begin. Once established, it spreads through wood fibers and can undermine trim, siding, decks, and framing with surprising speed. Whether you're getting a home ready for market or evaluating a property to buy, a disciplined approach to inspection avoids expensive surprises and gives both sides a rational basis for negotiations.

This guide draws on field experience from hundreds of site visits across King County and the surrounding area, from mid-century homes in Wedgwood to newer builds in West Seattle. It lays out where rot shows up first, how to separate cosmetic damage from structural risk, and when to call a dry rot repair contractor versus a general handyman. It also covers what Seattle buyers and sellers can realistically expect regarding disclosure, repairs, and pricing.

Why dry rot is so common around Puget Sound

Fungi that cause rot thrive when wood stays above roughly 20 percent moisture. In Seattle, wet winters and shaded lots keep many assemblies damp for months. The biggest culprits are design and maintenance details that trap water: tight gutters that overflow onto fascia, missing kickout flashing at roof-to-wall junctions, unsealed end grain on trim, and siding run too close to grade. Once moisture meets cellulose, decay follows.

I often see localized rot appear within five to seven years on unprimed trim ends and fascia boards, even on otherwise well-built houses. Conversely, houses with deep eaves, properly vented rainscreen siding, and diligent caulking can go decades with minimal repairs. Climate sets the stage, but details decide the outcome.

The inspection mindset: slow, methodical, skeptical

A proper Seattle dry rot inspection blends what you can see, what you can touch, and what you can infer. Plan to circle the house twice. First, step back to read the big picture: rooflines, drainage, sun exposure, vegetation. Then move in close with a flashlight and an awl or small screwdriver. You are not trying to poke holes through every board, but light probing at suspect points tells you far more than a quick visual scan.

Expect to get a little dirty. Pull mulch back from the base of siding. Kneel to see the underside of window sills. Lift a few shingles at roof-to-wall intersections. The goal is to trace water's path, then test the wood that lives [dry rot repair](#) in that splash zone. If you work slowly and keep asking where water would go, you will find most of the problems.

Exterior hot spots that deserve extra attention

Some assemblies fail so consistently in Seattle that I check them first, every time. When I inspect for a buyer, I often uncover 80 percent of dry rot issues at these locations. Sellers should prioritize these areas before listing, especially if the home will be photographed after a stretch of dry weather that can mask moisture issues.

- Kickout flashing at roof-to-wall intersections: Where a roof terminates into a vertical wall, water concentrates and runs behind siding if the kickout flashing is missing or undersized. Probe the lower few feet of siding and sheathing below that intersection. Softness here often telegraphs hidden sheathing decay.
- Bottom edges and end grain of exterior trim: Unsealed or unprimed end grain on corner boards, belly bands, and window trim drinks water. Check the bottom inch of vertical boards and the lower corners of horizontal trim. Exterior trim repair often starts with just these inches.
- Window sills and mullions on the south and west elevations: Seattle's rare sunny days still matter. UV exposure breaks down paint film, which accelerates moisture ingress the rest of the year. Press along the outer edges of sills and the lower corners of casings. If paint flakes off in sheets and wood yields under light pressure, you likely need house trim repair rather than just paint.
- Deck-to-house connections: Ledger boards are notorious. Probe the ledger, the band joist above, and the first few joists. Improper flashing or overdriven fasteners creates a cavity that traps water. If you see mushroomed screw heads and black staining, plan for invasive inspection.
- Near-grade siding and stair stringers: Any siding or trim within 6 inches of soil or garden beds wicks moisture up from below. Pull back mulch. Look for delamination on plywood-based products, crumbling fiber cement at cut edges, and punky stair stringers where they meet the landing. Siding repair Seattle contractors handle this scenario constantly: partial replacement, raise the grade clearance, then retrim.

What dry rot actually looks and feels like

Decayed wood changes character. It loses density and its grain structure loosens, which you can feel with a tool. Visual signs help, but touch is decisive.

- **Texture:** Sound wood resists a probe and gives a crisp squeak when pierced. Rotted wood compresses, crumbles, or flakes into stringy fibers. The transition can be sudden; two inches away may still be solid.
- **Color:** Rot often appears darker or blotchy, but color alone misleads. Tannins, mildew, and sun exposure can stain sound wood. Trust your probe.
- **Smell:** A musty odor suggests long-term moisture, but lack of smell does not clear the area.
- **Paint behavior:** Peeling in strips, bubbling, alligatoring, and recurring caulk failures at the same joint signal trapped moisture. If paint lifts off in a membrane, expect decayed substrate below.

I sometimes use a pin-type moisture meter, but numbers without context can send you on a wild goose chase. A reading above 20 percent in November beside a leaking downspout may go back to normal by July after repairs. A low reading on a dry day does not prove safety if the wood is already structurally compromised. Your probe and judgment count more than the gadget.

Unmasking hidden rot behind siding and trim

The most consequential rot lives where you can't see it. In the Pacific Northwest, water intrusion at penetrations creates pockets of decay in the sheathing and framing. The classics: hose bibs, light fixtures, vents, and satellite dish mounts. I've opened up walls where the only exterior clue was a mystifying paint bubble the size of a coin.

Clues to hidden damage include swollen trim, fasteners that no longer bite, and caulk lines that open back up a few weeks after repair. Tap gently with the handle of your tool; a hollow thud beside a window often points to sheathing rot. If you suspect a problem at a high-stakes location, such as a large window or a deck ledger, recommend an invasive inspection. That may mean removing a piece of trim or a clapboard. Sellers sometimes balk, but the cost of exploratory work is small next to the risk of selling or buying into a structural liability.

Material-specific notes: cedar, fiber cement, LP/OSB, and PVC

Cedar siding and trim can last decades if detailed well. It tolerates intermittent wetting and dries quickly, but end grain is its Achilles' heel. Always prime six sides before installation. If you see bare end grain at corner boards or sill noses, plan on exterior trim repair with properly primed replacements.

Fiber cement resists biological decay, yet it is not invincible. The cut edges and lower course can chip and wick moisture if installed too close to grade. Look for spalling at nail heads and delamination at butt joints. Seattle siding contractors in seattle often replace only the bottom two courses after a decade of soggy bark mulch.

LP or OSB-based sidings from certain eras have well-documented failure modes. Swelling at horizontal joints, crumbly edges, and nail heads pulling through are red flags. If you're evaluating a 1990s house in Ballard with this material, assume some siding replacement services seattle wa will be part of ownership costs, even if [siding repair contractor](#) the face looks decent today.

PVC and composite trim does not rot, but it can trap water against wood sheathing if not vented. I have pulled off perfectly intact PVC to find blackened plywood behind. The trim survived; the house did not. Venting and flashing matter regardless of material.

Roofs, gutters, and the domino effect

Roof maintenance is rot prevention. Clogged gutters and misdirected downspouts dump water onto the siding and foundation. Look for tiger-striping on fascia, moss mats along lower shingles, and splash marks on the siding below downspout elbows. In Seattle's tree-heavy neighborhoods, gutters can clog within weeks in fall. A twice-yearly cleaning is the minimum; homes under big maples may need three to four cleanings, plus leaf guards sized to our needle-heavy debris.

Kickout flashing deserves its own mention again, because missing or undersized kickouts at roof-wall joints rank among the top three causes of seattle dry rot repair calls I see each year. If a house lacks kickouts, budget for trim and siding repair in that quadrant, not just a sheet-metal tweak.

Windows and doors: where elegance meets entropy

Windows fail in two ways: water through the unit, and water around it. Most of the time in Seattle, failure around the unit causes the damage. We find missing head flashing, no sill pan, or a nail-fin punctured by a poorly placed fastener. Probe the lower window corners and the sheathing immediately below. If you can dethrone a trim nail with two fingers, the substrate is compromised.

Wood window sills can be milled and dutch-patched if the rot is limited, which a skilled dry rot repair contractor can do without full unit replacement. Vinyl windows with compromised installation need wall remediation more than window swap. Buyers should differentiate between unit age and installation quality; a 15-year-old window in a perfect pan with good flashing usually outperforms a 5-year-old window installed into bare sheathing.

Doors are similar. Exterior thresholds collect water. Check the side jamb bottoms and the subfloor at the entry, especially at covered porches that focus wind-driven rain. If the lock-side jamb is soft, assume the adjacent framing has seen moisture too.

Decks, stairs, and railings

A deck can look stout and still hide rot at connections. Probe the tops of joists where decking boards meet. If water sits between composite decking and wood framing, expect decay lines in the joist crowns. Post bases that sit too close to grade wick moisture into the end grain; once that starts, the decay climbs.

Stair stringers suffer most at the bottom, where they rest on concrete. If paint is spalling or the wood flakes out like wet cardboard, the stringer should be replaced. I favor preservative-treated stringers with stand-offs that lift the wood above the landing, paired with sealed end grain. Cheap repairs here do not last.

Foundation interfaces and crawlspaces

Not all rot is above grade. Poor drainage, downspout discharge at the foundation, and missing vapor barriers create a humid crawlspace that feeds decay from below. In Seattle, many older homes have minimal ventilation. I carry a hygrometer; if relative humidity sits above 60 percent for long periods, watch for fungal growth on joists.

Probe the rim joist near vent openings and plumbing penetrations. White fungal mycelium on joists is not always structural decay, but it means conditions are right for it. If insulation is falling, that often indicates rodents or moisture. Both can mask rot until it is advanced.

A practical checklist for sellers before listing

- Walk the exterior slowly after a steady rain, and again after two dry days. Note any areas that stay wet.
- Probe trim ends, window sills, deck ledger, and near-grade siding. Mark soft spots with painter's tape.
- Clear gutters, add downspout extenders, and verify kickout flashing exists at roof-wall intersections.
- Pull mulch 8 inches back from siding, cut vegetation away, and reset sprinklers to avoid wetting the house.
- Get written bids from reputable siding contractors seattle wa or a dry rot repair contractor for any confirmed issues. Attach these to your disclosures.

This short list does not replace a full inspection, but it gives you leverage. By documenting conditions, you show buyers you are proactive, which often diffuses alarm when the buyer's inspector finds the same items. You also set the stage for targeted seattle trim repair or siding repair seattle teams to address issues quickly during escrow if needed.

A focused approach for buyers during due diligence

Buyers should assume the listing photos were taken on a dry day from flattering angles. Show up prepared. Wear shoes you can get muddy. Carry an awl and a flashlight. Start at the roof edges and move down, always thinking about water. If you find one soft trim end, look for the system failure behind it. Missing kickout? Check the sheathing. Failed caulk at a window? Ask about flashing and sill pans. If you uncover a cluster of small issues in one elevation, request invasive

inspection at one representative area. Your goal is not to extract concessions for maintenance-level items, but to quantify the risk of hidden structural rot.

In negotiations, tie requests to the way water moves. “Replace three trim boards” is vague. “Install kickout flashing at the north roof-wall intersection, remove lower two courses of siding in that bay, replace any decayed sheathing up to 16 square feet, re-flash window head, and reinstall with back-primed cedar, prime and paint to match” is actionable. Siding replacement services seattle wa can price that scope within a day, which keeps escrow on track.

Repair strategies: patch, piece-in, or replace

Not all rot calls for wholesale siding replacement. The right fix depends on extent, location, and future exposure.

Localized trim rot: If only the last inch of a corner board is soft and the surrounding wood is sound, piece-in a dutch patch with matching material. Back-prime and seal all end grain. This falls under exterior trim repair, and a skilled carpenter can make it disappear.

Sheathing behind siding: When decay extends into sheathing, you must remove enough siding to replace the compromised panel. This is where siding contractors in seattle earn their keep. Expect to replace 1 to 3 sheets in a localized repair, along with new building paper or WRB, proper flashings, and reinstalled siding with correct clearances.

Deck ledger and band joist: Safety first. If the ledger is compromised, support the deck immediately. Then open up the wall to replace the band joist and ledger, add proper flashing, and reinstall with approved fasteners. There is no safe shortcut here.

Historic or specialty profiles: Older homes may use trim profiles no longer in stock. A good dry rot repair Seattle team can mill custom sills or match casings. It costs more, but the visual continuity matters in a craftsman or Tudor where mismatched trim telegraphs a patch job.

Whole-elevation replacement: If scattered repairs cover more than a quarter of a wall, or if the material has a systemic failure history, replacing the full elevation can be cheaper and better-looking than Swiss-cheesing the façade. This is a judgment call made with a clear-eyed contractor and a frank budget discussion.

Costs and timelines you can actually plan around

Prices vary by access, height, and scope, but ranges help:

- Simple trim replacement at ground level: often 300 to 700 per location, including paint touch-up.
- Localized sheathing and siding repair around a window: 1,200 to 3,500, depending on material and whether the window must be reset.
- Deck ledger remediation: 2,000 to 6,000 for partial wall open-up and structural repair, more if finishes complicate access.
- Whole-elevation residing with rainscreen detailing: 12 to 25 per square foot installed, including WRB, flashings, and paint.

In busy months, siding replacement services seattle wa book out 2 to 6 weeks. Emergency safety items get triaged sooner. If you are selling, line up a contractor early. If you are buying, request a holdback in escrow to cover confirmed repairs when schedules run long.

Preventive details that pay off in Seattle

Prevention is easier than remediation. A few details make an outsized difference in our climate.

Back-prime and seal end grain: It bears repeating because it is the most neglected step I see. Every cut. Every time.

Maintain clearances: Keep siding at least 6 inches above grade and 1 to 2 inches above horizontal surfaces like roofs and decks. If landscaping has crept up, remove soil and mulch.

Vent rain screens: A ventilated gap behind cladding gives trapped moisture a way out. Even on fiber cement, furring strips with vented bug screen at top and bottom add years to a system’s life.

Install real kickouts: Not a bent shingle or a dab of sealant. A properly sized metal kickout that dumps water into the gutter.

Control downspouts: Extend discharge 4 to 6 feet from the foundation or into a tightline. Splash blocks at the base of the wall are not enough on heavy rain days.

How disclosures and expectations play out locally

Washington sellers must disclose known material defects, and dry rot qualifies. That said, the form relies on seller knowledge. If you patched a soft corner with filler last summer, that is knowledge. If you never looked behind the deck ledger, that is not. Buyers, order an inspection, then calibrate your requests to the age and price point of the home. Expect older houses to have some trim and siding wear, and focus on water management and structural implications rather than cosmetic blemishes.

When a report calls out dry rot, the conversation often improves when a qualified contractor clarifies scope. A Seattle dry rot inspection that includes moisture mapping, photos, and a specific repair prescription calms everyone. If a seller offers a credit, make sure it aligns with likely repair costs, not wishful thinking. If a seller agrees to repair, require that a licensed dry rot repair contractor completes the work, not a general painter with caulk and hope.

Choosing the right partner for repairs

The best contractors are curious and a little paranoid about water. Ask how they approach diagnostics. If their plan is “replace the bad boards and recaulk,” keep looking. Good siding contractors Seattle WA will talk about WRB integration, pan flashing, rainscreen gaps, and end-grain sealing. They will show you photos of similar repairs and explain why the previous assembly failed.

I keep a short list of firms I trust for siding repair Seattle projects because they document well. They photograph each stage, from demo to flashing to final paint. That documentation matters for buyers who inherit the home later; it shows that the repair addressed cause, not just appearance.

A final walk-through script buyers and sellers can share

On the last visit before closing or before listing photos, spend fifteen minutes together outside. Start at the highest risk area and work clockwise. Confirm gutters are clear, kickouts present, caulk lines smooth and properly tooled, trim ends sealed, and grade clearance maintained. Tug lightly on recently installed trim. Look for nail set holes filled and painted, not left open. If repairs were done, review the contractor’s photos on a phone and match them to locations. This small ritual builds trust and catches the stray detail that slipped past a busy crew.

Seattle’s climate will always test our buildings. With a deliberate inspection, targeted Seattle dry rot repair, and a few humble pieces of sheet metal and primer, houses here can shrug off the rain for decades. Buyers gain confidence, sellers earn credibility, and both avoid the spiral of hidden damage that turns a simple sale into a saga.

Seattle Trim Repair 8338 20th Ave NW, Seattle, WA 98117 (425) 517-1751