

What Do Inspectors Look For?

Most jurisdictions require the contractor to call the building department to request inspections, normally one day in advance. When the inspector arrives at the job site, regardless of the type of inspection, the first question is usually "Where are the approved plans?"

Most violations are a result of contractors being in a hurry; other violations result from contractors not knowing specific code requirements. And some violations are just outright mistakes. Following is a description of the inspections as they normally take place.

Foundation:

The footing or foundation wall forms and any reinforcement must be in place as shown on the plans. Common violations:

- Footings are not below the frostline for the area (12, 18, or 24 inches in Oregon)

- Reinforcements do not have adequate ground clearance (two inches or more)

- Fill material beneath footings is not compacted and tested

- Rebar for the electrical system ground not installed in the footing and extended into the framed wall.

- Inadequate crawlspace vents in foundation wall

- No hold-down anchors in place in addition to anchor bolts for lateral support

Floor framing:

This is the biggest, most extensive inspection done on a structure. All of the structural components of the building - windows, doors, roof and wall sheathing, plumbing, electrical, and mechanical systems - will be in place. The structural inspector verifies that the plumbing and electrical systems have been approved by other inspectors. Some common violations may include:

- Truss bracing not in place

- Inadequate firestopping

- Framing members not appropriately sized

- Holes in top of bottom plate (must be sealed)

- Floor (i.e., under a tub or shower) not sealed

- Bedroom egress (exit) window openings too small

Insulation:

Inspection performed after walls and ceilings are insulated. The R-value must be verified. Common problems include vapor barriers not in place or torn vapor barriers that need repairs. Quite often, lack of sufficient insulation in the stud spaces will leave a void at the top.

Final:

Performed after the structure is completed. The inspector verifies the following:

- Plumbing, electrical, and mechanical installations have been approved

- Smoke detectors work properly

- Required handrails, guardrails, exterior stairs, exterior finish grading, and street numbers are in place

Most code violations can be corrected while the inspector is on site. The structure may be approved if the contractor provides a statement ensuring that violations will be corrected. Often, additional time is required, not additional expense. A reinspection may be required, for major violations. Corrections can also be inspected during the next scheduled inspection.