



WESTERN SPECIALTY CONTRACTORS

Property Inspections

The Critical First Step

How to Use a Building Component Inventory to Provide Clients More Value

Are you preparing to launch a new or revamped maintenance program? Then the first thing you will need to do, even before you do an inspection, is to create a building component inventory.

And while it sometimes feels like this step is unnecessary, it makes sense to do it because you'll end up spending a lot more money and time if you don't.

A proper building component inventory will set your maintenance program upon the firm foundation it needs to drive the results you're looking to achieve.

What should your inventory include?

There are plenty of factors, but this chapter will focus on the three essential ones you should consider.

What is a building component inventory?

The phrase "building component inventory" might sound fancy or complicated. But it's not. And you can implement one no matter what kind of experience or technical expertise you have.

An inventory is a list of all the building components included in your preventive maintenance program. Each component will also have some general information on its condition.

It can be as simple as a spreadsheet, or more complex. Whatever works best for you and your property.



List the building components

Which components will you include in your building component inventory?

Preventive maintenance costs money and time, so including everything might not be smart.

But here's a general rule of thumb to follow for those decisions.

For each component, ask yourself: Is the component critical to the safe operation of the building, expensive to replace, or difficult to purchase off the shelf?

If the building component is any one of those three things, include it in your maintenance program and building component inventory.

Determine the condition of building components

What's the current condition of the building component? Is that condition different from previous inspections? The same?

It's usually a good idea to create what's called a condition rating scale. Which, once again, isn't as scary as it sounds.

It could be something like good-fair-poor. Or it can be more complex, like a one-to-ten numerical scale.

The important part is that the scale allows you to understand the condition of the property's main components when you look at your inventory.



Figure out how old components are

An inventory with just a list of components and their conditions is powerful. But this step will supercharge your results and save you lots of time.

What's the secret? Asking yourself a few easy questions:

- How long is the component supposed to last?
- How old is the component?
- How much longer should I expect this component to last?

By answering that last question, you'll be able to time repairs better, make budgets more accurate, and avoid unnecessary costs.



The Secrets of Efficient Property Inspections (Even for Construction Non-Experts)

The inspection plan is today's property maintenance darling. It helps you sustain a healthy and attractive property. Maintenance projects become more predictable. Plus, your tenant satisfaction, retention, and attraction all improve.

It's easy to think the most important success factor in inspections is construction expertise.

But even folks who don't primarily think of themselves as "technical" can build a strong inspection program — if they have the strategy and know-how to make it work.

Planning inspections is 90% of the battle

Property inspections can be expensive and time-consuming. But they don't have to be.

Planning is what makes the difference.

You'll find a common theme here at western maintenance academy:

The most critical maintenance skill you can develop as a property manager is ... strategy.

Luckily, for you (and me) those skills are 100% learnable. Anyone who tries to tell you otherwise is speaking from their insecurity and lack of experience.



First the what, then the who

So how do we create this inspection plan?

For many of us, the first question to ask at this stage is, “What building components are we going to inspect?”

Figuring out what to inspect is easy if you’ve already created a building component inventory.

Next, it’s time to figure out what information you want to get from the inspections. At a minimum, you’ll want to know the current condition of each component.

Do you want inspectors to record a condition rating for each component? Do you want written descriptions about the condition? What about pictures?

Take your time during this phase. You’re looking for as many opportunities to take the guesswork out as you can find. This is the phase of your maintenance program that leads you to inspections that are:

- Highly effective, because they ensure you get the right data
- Cost efficient
- Simpler and quicker to do

The right way to approach “Who”

Once you know what components to inspect and what information to record, you’re ready to identify who will inspect each component.

At this point, you don’t have to assign individuals. But you do need to decide what type of person will, and there are two general options:

- In-house maintenance staff
- Outside specialists, like a contractor or consultant



For example, to assess a building's structural integrity, you'd need a structural engineer.

Other situations aren't as obvious. For those, the question to answer is,

Does my maintenance staff have the expertise to identify the root causes of building deficiencies?

Can they identify problems and why those problems are happening?

The answer may not come to you right away but keep asking. Often, this question will lead you to tighten up your "Who" or your "What" (or both), until you have a super effective inspection program.



3 Keys to Doing Successful Property Inspections

If you want to reduce maintenance costs, there are a lot of advantages to doing property inspections.

To begin with, they give you valuable information that makes the stressful maintenance decision-making process much easier and straightforward.

But we all know that proper inspections involve more than just walking around a property looking for potential issues.

There are tons of property inspections that don't do much to help the manager and owner. And there are a few successful standouts.

Here's how to put your property inspection into the second category.

#1: Start with standardized methods

Successful inspection programs are built on a foundation of excellent standardized methods.

They help improve consistency from inspection to inspection over time. That way, you can reliably compare results from a current inspection to past ones.

Our recommendations include:

- Taking several pictures of each component's condition — don't try to rely on notes from inspectors exclusively
- Using a condition rating scale — keep ratings as simple as possible

Sometimes folks are tempted to start doing inspections first, then figuring out how to record the data later. That's a recipe for expensive mistakes and a less-than-awesome inspection.



#2: Instructions matter

Successful inspections leverage great written guidelines.

Starting with standardized methods will get you a good way down this road, but if your team needs some more help, make sure to provide them with written instructions they can review.

Even if your inspection is set up correctly, it only makes it harder to get the traction if your staff isn't sure what to do.

It's not about dumbing it down — it's about taking the guesswork out of the equation.

#3: Create checklists (or know where to get them)

Successful inspections have rock-solid processes.

If you're new to exterior maintenance, creating checklists can be a fun and exciting way to get better.

But if you want to do a great inspection, you need to pay your dues and learn how to make excellent inspection checklists.

If that isn't you yet, you can shortcut this by asking a contractor to help you. You might supply the vision and property knowledge, and they bring their years of experience and expertise.



5 Ways to Tap into the Big-Time Power of Condition Ratings

To understand how cost-effective maintenance programs work, consider how you approach filling up your car with gas.

When do you usually get gas? Do you wait until you run out and get stuck on the side of the road? Or when your low fuel light pops on, do you panic, drop everything, and head to the nearest gas station?

If you're like most people, you don't do either. Both strategies are ridiculous.

Instead, you get gas sometime between those two points. You never risk waiting too long and running out. But you also don't panic when your car warns that you need gas soon.

The sneakily useful tool called "condition ratings" follows the same logic as a low fuel light. And when you use them right, it can help you make smart decisions almost automatically (like getting gas before running out.)

What are condition ratings?

Before diving into how you can leverage the power of condition ratings, let's take a step back and look at the big picture.

Property managers should assign a condition rating to each building component after completing an inspection. The ratings should be based on a scale that's created beforehand.

Every car has a condition rating scale for fuel:

- Full tank
- 3/4
- 1/2



- 1/4
- Low fuel warning

Condition rating scales for properties can be simple (good-fair-poor-critical.) Or they can be involved (1-10 numerical index.) It's entirely up to you and what works best at your property.

Now that we know what condition ratings are let's take a look at how you can use them to save tons of time, money, and effort.

#1: Know condition changes

A building component's condition going from Good to Fair is like a low fuel warning light popping on.

A change in condition provides you with a valuable warning, which helps you make the right maintenance decisions in critical situations.

#2: Know if you need to fix something

The low fuel warning light also takes out the guesswork of when we should fill up our car.

When should you make a repair? How can you time it to save as much money as possible?

Using condition ratings can automatically answer both questions for you.

#3: Make inspection data objective

Condition ratings that everyone understands help make inspections more accurate and reduce the subjectivity of individuals' judgments.

A good tip for helping your staff on using condition ratings is to provide pictures of components in each condition.



#4: Make inspection data easier to digest

Condition ratings help you see the big picture at your property.

By indicating the condition rating of each component in your inventory, you'll have a 30,000-foot view of your property's condition that you can understand by quickly glancing at the document.

This helps with strategy and efficiency.

#5: Make prioritizing and budgeting easier

By combining condition ratings with other risk management and cost evaluation tools, you'll be able to set the right priorities and make useful budgets.

Ratings not only make the process easier for you, but they help with communicating with ownership as well.



When and How Often to do Exterior Property Inspections

We get some common questions when it comes to exterior property inspections.

- When should I do inspections?
- How often should I do inspections?

Inspections are an essential part of sustaining an attractive property and minimizing risk, so having the right frequency and schedule for them is huge for your success.

There's no perfect rule, and every property will be different. But here are three things to consider when determining when and how often to do exterior inspections at your property.

#1: Property type, use, and location

The type, use, and location of your property play a significant role in determining inspection frequency.

For example, a high-class office building will require a lot more inspections than a warehouse property.

Consider things like:

- Size
- Traffic
- Vacancy
- Visibility
- Neighborhood



#2: The overall condition

After you've thought about those things, it's time to account for what kind of shape the property is in right now.

How old is your property? What's the maintenance history? What about the deterioration rate of building components?

#3: Staff availability

Your on-site maintenance staff and the size of the portfolio you manage will naturally influence your inspection schedule and frequency.

After evaluating all the factors, you'll want to determine a schedule and frequency for all your major components.

Some common frequencies are:

- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Annually

And when it comes to the timeline or schedule, you'll want to try to conduct inspections at times when they'll impact tenants' businesses the least.

