

Chicago Home PRE-LISTING INSPECTION CHECKLIST FOR SELLERS



Before listing your home, a pre-inspection is one of the smartest investments you can make. No house is perfect - even brand-new construction can hide defects. By conducting this "checkup" in advance, you'll uncover potential issues before the buyer's inspector does, avoid unwelcome surprises, and have the chance to repair or disclose on your own terms. A pre-inspection can save you time, strengthen your negotiating position, and help you move toward closing with far less stress. Below are the most common items inspectors check.

Grounds and Drainage

- ☐ Lot grading slopes away from the foundation (no negative grade).
- ☐ No evidence of standing water or poor drainage near the house.
- ☐ Downspouts and extensions discharge at least 5 feet away from the foundation.
- ☐ No leaks or seepage from septic tank/leech field (if applicable).
- ☐ Driveways, sidewalks, patios pitched away from structure; no heaving or major cracks.
- ☐ Yard, landscaping, and trees in good condition; no branches touching roof or siding.
- ☐ Exterior structures (fences, sheds, decks, retaining walls, detached garages) are stable and free of rot or termite damage.
- ☐ Railings on stairs, decks, and landings are present, secure, and of proper height.
- ☐ Check for city sidewalk trip hazards (common in Chicago freeze-thaw cycles).
- ☐ Alley access and garage apron in good condition (no major settlement or pooling water).

Foundation and Structure

- ☐ Visible foundation straight, plumb, no major cracks, spalling, or efflorescence.
- ☐ Ridge lines and fascia appear straight and level; no evidence of settlement.
- ☐ Sides of house not bowing or leaning.
- ☐ Basement walls show no bulging, leaning, or seepage stains.
- ☐ Window and door frames square, not racked or bowed.
- ☐ Masonry and foundation walls properly tuckpointed (critical in Chicago brick homes).
- ☐ Check for signs of past flood control systems (overhead sewers, check valves, sump pumps).

Exterior Surfaces

- ☐ Minimum 6" clearance between soil and siding; no wood-to-earth contact.
- ☐ Siding: no cracks, curling, loose boards, rot, or decay.
- ☐ Masonry veneer: mortar joints intact; no loose, spalling, or flaking bricks.
- ☐ Parapet walls capped and properly flashed.

- Stucco: no large cracks; any cracks noted for professional review.
- Vinyl/aluminum siding: secure, no dents, bowing, or loose panels.
- Concrete block walls should be properly sealed and repelling moisture
- No ivy or vines attached to exterior walls (common in older Chicago homes).
- Exterior paint/stain intact; no blistering or peeling.
- No unexplained stains on exterior surfaces.
- Lintels above windows and doors not rusting or bowing.

Windows, Doors, and Trim

- Frames and sills free of rot, secure, caulked.
- No broken glass or failed thermal seals (cloudy double-pane units).
- Screens intact, storm windows present where applicable.
- Proper drip caps above windows and doors.
- Check for weather-stripping and operational locks.
- Basement windows secure, no water intrusion evidence.

Roof and Gutters

- Shingles (asphalt): no curling, cupping, granule loss, or missing shingles; ≤ 2 layers present.
- Flat roofs: membrane intact, no ponding water, alligating, or open seams.
- Wood shakes/shingles: no rot, cracks, or moss.
- Flashing is properly installed around chimneys, vents, and skylights.
- Soffits/fascia intact, no stains or decay.
- Attic and eave vents open, unobstructed.
- Gutters/downspouts intact, properly pitched, no rust or sagging, gutter heat tape a bonus..
- Chicago-specific: ice dam protection visible at eaves.
- Chimney: plumb, properly flashed, brick/mortar intact, cap and crown sealed.

Attic

- No water stains under roof decking, especially near penetrations.
- Structural members sound, no sagging, rot, or insect damage.
- Adequate insulation with a vapor barrier facing the heated space.
- Proper ventilation via soffit, ridge, and/or gable vents.
- No mechanical or plumbing vents terminating in the attic.
- No open electrical splices or abandoned wiring.
- Chicago-specific: check for evidence of prior ice dam leaks.

Interior Rooms

- Floors, walls, and ceilings are level and plumb; no bulging or major cracks.
- No stains on walls, ceilings, or floors (indicating past leaks).
- Windows and exterior doors open/close smoothly, latch properly, and have no drafts.
- Interior doors aligned, latch properly, hardware intact.

- Flooring materials in good condition, no cupping or gapping in the hardwood flooring.
- Trim and finishes are neat and secure.
- Adequate lighting; switches and outlets are functional.
- Spot-test outlets; proper grounding present.
- Heat/cooling registers present in each habitable room.
- Fireplaces: damper operable, flue lined and clean, no backdraft stains.
- Adequate insulation noted in accessible walls.

Kitchen

- GFCI protection for outlets within 6 ft of sink.
- Working exhaust fan vented to exterior.
- Dishwasher drains properly, no leaks.
- Plumbing under sink dry; no staining or rot.
- Adequate water flow, no rust on disposal or pipes.
- Appliances operate properly.
- Cabinets and drawers in good condition, doors aligned, open and close smoothly.
- Chicago-specific: confirm stove has anti-tip bracket installed.

Bathrooms

- Exhaust fan operational, vented outside (not to attic).
- Adequate water pressure at all fixtures.
- Drains functional, no leaks at traps.
- Metal sinks free of rust, overflow drains intact.
- Toilets stable, no rocking, no staining at base.
- Tubs/showers properly caulked and grouted; tile secure.
- Floors around toilets and tubs are solid, no sponginess.
- No evidence of prior leaks around bath/shower enclosures.

Basement and Mechanical Room

- No evidence of seepage, standing water, or recent flooding.
- Foundation walls free of major cracks, bowing, or efflorescence.
- Structural wood sound, properly bolted to the foundation.
- Sump pump present and operational (common in Chicago basements).
- Backflow prevention/check valve installed where applicable.
- Insulation at rim joists is in good condition.
- Adequate headroom and safe stair access.

Crawl Space

- Vented to exterior (if not sealed system).
- Insulation present at rim joists and under floors.
- No evidence of insect activity or wood rot.

- Vapor barrier installed over soil; no standing water.
- Plumbing lines insulated; no freeze risk.

Plumbing

- Visible supply and drain pipes intact, no leaks.
- Adequate slope to drains.
- Water heater sized appropriately; vented properly, no rust or leaks.
- Hot water 118–125°F.
- Galvanized pipes (if present) not restricting flow.
- Sewer line condition confirmed (recommend sewer scope due to Chicago's aging clay lines).
- No cross-connections or backflow risks.
- Well water test acceptable (if applicable).

Electrical

- Service panel capacity adequate; breakers/fuses labeled and not overheating.
- No knob-and-tube wiring; no aluminum branch circuits.
- Wiring secured, no open junctions or splices.
- Outlets properly grounded, three-prong where required.
- AFCI protection in bedrooms (modern code).
- GFCI protection in garages, kitchens, baths, and exterior.
- Capability to add EV chargers (a bonus soon to be a code requirement)

Heating and Cooling

- Furnace operational, distributes heat evenly.
- No combustion gas odors; flues properly sloped and sealed.
- Cooling system functional, coils not rusted.
- Air filters are clean.
- Ducts intact, sealed.
- No asbestos insulation on pipes or ducts.
- Chimney/flue separates solid-fuel appliances from gas/oil.

Miscellaneous Safety and Code

- Smoke detectors on every level and outside bedrooms (per Chicago ordinance).
- Carbon monoxide detectors within 15 ft of sleeping areas.
- Stair treads, risers, and handrails are solid and to code.
- Automatic garage door opener has safety eyes and reverses properly.
- Railings and balusters meet current spacing requirements.
- Chicago-specific: radon test recommended (high prevalence in region).
- Chicago-specific: check for lead-based paint hazards in pre-1978 homes.