

# SDCI Rental Housing Inspections



Seattle Department of  
Construction & Inspections

Seattle Renter's Commission  
March 7, 2022

# SDCI PURPOSE AND VALUES

## Our Purpose

Helping people build a safe, livable, and inclusive Seattle.

## Our Values

- Equity
- Respect
- Quality
- Integrity
- Service

# Two Types of Housing Inspections

## RRIO

- All rental properties (except government owned)
- City initiated through landlord
- Random
- Once every 5-10 years
- Landlord secures access
- Streamlined checklist
- City tracks follow-up repairs

## Complaint-Based

- Tenant initiated
- Tenant provides access
- Comprehensive maintenance code
- Scope and follow-up partially dictated by tenant
- City engages with landlord when problems found

# RRIO OVERVIEW

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- City Council passed RRIO in late 2012 to help ensure that all rental housing in Seattle is safe and meets basic housing maintenance requirements – SMC 22.214 (you can always view the code online)
- All rental properties (with few exceptions) must **register** with the city and pass a periodic **inspection** (once every 5-10 years)
- RRIO was shaped by:
  - Studies and experience with substandard housing problems in Seattle
  - Other similar programs nationwide
  - Authorizing State law and WA Supreme Court ruling
  - Stakeholder input

# RRIO INSPECTIONS

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- All properties are selected in random order (by a computer algorithm) for inspection once every 5-10 years
- Selection of units – 20 percent on multi-family properties – or property owners can choose to voluntarily inspect at 100 percent
- Target = 4,000 inspections/year
  - Inspections greatly curtailed during 2019 & 2020 due to COVID



# RRIO INSPECTIONS

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- Property owners are given 60-day notice by email and mail
- Inspections can be completed by:
  - City of Seattle Inspector
  - Qualified Private Inspector
  - Approved Alternate Inspection (e.g. HUD or Seattle Housing Authority inspection)

# RRIO INSPECTIONS

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- Inspection follows a checklist based on Seattle's broader Housing and Building Maintenance Code  
<https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDCI/Codes/RRIO/RRIOChecklist.pdf>
- Can expand RRIO inspection (on multi-family properties) if widespread problems found.
- Follow-up and Auditing
  - Review private inspector submittals
  - Leave behind surveys for renters

# What we are seeing – RRIO Inspections

Top Inspection Failures
*1.4.e Exterior Stairs: Handrails/intermediate rails on any flight with more than three risers are missing, loose, or broken.
*3.3.a Smoke alarms are missing, not functional, or not installed inside of all sleeping rooms.
*3.3.d Carbon monoxide alarms are missing, not functional, or not installed in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home. Note: Carbon monoxide alarms should not be located within 15 feet of fuel burning appliances.
*1.4.d Exterior Stairs: Guardrails/intermediate rails on any landing, deck, or platform that are 30 inches or more above grade or other surfaces are missing, loose, or broken.
*2.3.d Handrails/, including approved intermediate rails or other guards on any surface 30 inches or more above adjacent walking surfaces, on any flight with more than three risers are missing, loose, broken, not graspable or otherwise unsafe.
*6.2 Any electrical equipment (meter bays, service panel, subpanels, shutoff) is improperly installed or connected, tampered with, or unsafe.
*3.3.b Smoke alarms are missing, not functional, or not installed in a central location outside all sleeping rooms.
*6.1 Exposed unprotected wiring is evident in any room.
*3.3.c Smoke alarms are missing, not functional, or not installed on each floor, including basements.
*2.3.e Guardrails/, including approved intermediate rails or other guards, on any landings, or platforms that are 30 inches or more above adjacent walking surfaces are missing, loose, broken, or otherwise unsafe.



# Complaint-Based Inspections

Housing complaints have been increasing

Year	Housing Complaints
2021	1,136
2020	963
2019	994
2018	820
2017	574

# *How People Find Us*

## Outreach

- Web portal – [seattle.gov/rentinginseattle](http://seattle.gov/rentinginseattle)
- Renting in Seattle phonenumber– 206-684-5700
- Complaint line—206-615-0808
- Infographics and videos
- Trainings and community events

## Grants

- Education
- Organizing
- Assistance and counseling



# How the process works

Tenants and landlords contact SDCI by phone and via the website

Supervising managers assign inspectors

Staff work through complaints in the order received, except

Emergency housing conditions and eviction issues get priority

Adapted process during COVID pandemic

# The Tools we use

- **Tracking** – each complaint is tracked in our IT system as it progresses through the compliance process
- **Triage** – Emergency conditions get priority. Other complaints are managed in the order received.
- **Voluntary Compliance** – we strive to get the problem solved voluntarily and quickly – communication & problem solving
- **Enforcement** – If problems are not corrected, we can assess penalties – it's a slow process through the courts



# Tips for renters

Know SDCI can help

Notify the landlord right away – in writing

Call SDCI before it becomes a crisis

Work with us to gain access

Help with problem solving

# QUESTIONS & RESOURCES

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