

Historic Building Assessment Checklist

This checklist is not intended to replace an evaluation by a professional building inspector, architect, engineer, or contractor. However, the checklist is general enough to be adapted to any building and can help you identify building problem areas. If such problem areas are identified through use of this checklist, contact a preservation professional for assistance. Preservation Alliance of West Virginia has a list of qualified professionals if you are uncertain about whom to contact.

You should assess the condition of your building at least annually, but it is recommended to inspect the building in summer and winter because some problems are evident only during certain seasons. Do not be alarmed or overwhelmed if you identify a number of problems. By answering “yes” to questions on this checklist, you will be able to identify areas in need of repair and more severe problems, prepare a plan of action, and control costs of maintaining your building.

Roof:

___ Slate – Are there any missing, broken, or fallen pieces of slate? Are the metal roof valleys rusty?

___ Standing Seam Metal -- Is the roof material rusting?

___ Corrugated Metal -- Are there holes, loose, or missing fasteners? Are nails “popped-up,” loose, or sticking above the sheet metal?

___ Wood or asphalt shingles – Are shingles missing, curling, cupping, or losing mineral coating?

___ Flat – Are there bubbles, blisters or cracks?

___ Flat – Does water collect along the parapet (a low wall that hides the roofline), and is there debris in the roof drains?

___ Flat – Is the connection between the roof and parapet walls secure?

___ Is there water staining on the walls? This a good indication of water infiltration.

___ Do the chimneys or parapets have missing, cracked, or loose masonry or mortar?

Foundation:

___ Is there water collected near or at the building’s foundation? This indicates a drainage problem.

___ Are there vertical or diagonal cracks in the concrete or masonry foundation? If so, consult a mason or structural engineer. Hairline and horizontal cracks usually do not represent a problem.

___ Is the concrete or masonry spalling (flaking material), crumbling, or deteriorating?

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Exterior Walls (including clapboard, shingle, and masonry):

- Is paint peeling, blistering, or cracking?
- Are there bulges in the wall, or significant changes in siding patterns, materials, and sizes?
- Are there water stains or white powdery deposits (efflorescence)?
- Is there any mold or mildew on the wall surface?

Decks, Porches, and Balconies:

- Are there loose or deteriorated structural or decorative components?
- Are there crumbling or loose pieces of masonry or concrete piers?
- Are exterior stairs and railings rotting or rusting leading to deterioration?
- Does water collect near the base of the exterior wall?

Gutters & Downspouts: Inspect periodically for debris and toys. If downspouts run underground, determine where the water is going and if it is free-flowing.

- Are gutters clogged? Does water overflow in areas of the gutters?
- Are there loose, rotted, or missing gutters or downspouts?
- Is there leakage below grade, white deposits, or stains on areas of walls or foundation?

Wood windows (check each window individually):

- Do the sashes stick when operating?
- Is paint blistering, cracking, flaking, or peeling on window components (exterior and interior)?
- Is any wood at the exterior sill, frames, or sash saturated, decaying, and/or rotting?
- Is glazing around the panes of glass flaking or missing?
- Are sash cords broken or missing?
- Does condensation build on interior or exterior storm sashes during the winter months? Some condensation is normal but high amounts can deteriorate wood quickly.

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Attic: Check that your attic is insulated and ventilated.

___ Is there evidence of water leaks? Check during or soon after a heavy rain.

___ Are there signs of vermin infiltration?

___ Is there any missing or damaged pieces of wood? You might have to probe the wood with an ice pick. If you penetrate the wood with an ice pick, and wood pieces break against the wood grain, rot is most likely present.

Interior:

___ Are there stains on the walls, ceilings, or around the windows? This is evidence of water infiltration.

___ Are walls bulging?

___ Is paint peeling, blistering, or cracking?

___ Is plaster on the walls or ceilings damp, loose, or cracked?

___ Do floors deflect (sag or bounce) excessively? This may indicate structural failure and should be checked by a contractor or structural engineer.

___ Do doors stick when closed and do not operate freely? Binding may indicate uneven settling in walls or floors.

Moisture:

___ Is there presence of standing water, mold, fungus, or mildew?

___ Are there wet stains, eroding surfaces, or efflorescence (salt deposits) on interior or exterior surfaces?

___ Are there dank, musty smells in areas of high humidity or poorly ventilated spaces?

___ Is there rust or corrosion on metal elements?

Electrical: A visual inspection of wire insulation on accessible circuits will usually determine whether an electrician should perform additional tests. Check to make sure breakers or fuses are the correct size. Generally 20 amps for new wiring. For older wiring, no more than 15 amps is recommended.

___ Is the main electrical service to the building inadequate? 100 amps is minimum by modern standards. Large homes and home with central air conditioning or electric heat typically need 150 to 200 amps.

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_____ Is the insulation frayed on existing wires? Are bare wires exposed?

_____ Is there any sub-standard aluminum wire, surface mounted lampcord or extension cord, or “knob and tube” wiring in active use?

_____ Check all light switches and lights attached to the walls to ensure they work properly.

Lead Paint: If a “historic” house is broadly defined as being at least 50 years old, this means that almost every historic house contains some lead-based paint. In its deteriorated form, it produces paint chips and lead-laden dust particles that are a known health hazard to both children and adults. Children are particularly at risk when they ingest lead paint dust through direct hand-to-mouth contact and from toys or pacifiers. They are also at risk when they chew lead-painted surfaces in accessible locations. In addition to its presence in houses, lead paint chips and dust can contaminate soil in outdoor play areas. For more information about reducing lead-paint hazards in historic buildings, read Preservation Brief 37 located at <http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief37.htm>.