



Rental Registration and Safety Inspection Program

Program Administration

The RR&SIP is administered through the Planning & Community Development Department. In-person assistance with registration or inspection scheduling is available at the Permit Center.

General Information

1) What is the Rental Registration & Safety Inspection Program (RR&SIP)?

The Rental Registration & Safety Inspection Program (RR&SIP) was approved by the Bellingham City Council on March 9, 2015, after more than ten years of public involvement and proposals. The RR&SIP is designed to ensure that all rental housing units comply with specific life & fire safety standards and are providing a safe place for tenants to live.

A program designed "to protect the public health, safety, and welfare of tenants by encouraging the proper maintenance of residential rental housing." ([BMC 6.15.010](#)). This program was deemed necessary by the Bellingham City Council and was intended to ensure that all rental housing units, within Bellingham city limits, are safe to live in. Rental property owners are required to register their rental property with the city every year and have it inspected once every three years. The goals of the RR&SIP are:

- To ensure that Bellingham's rental housing meets specific life and fire safety standards.
- To promote compliance with these standards so that the health and safety of tenants is not jeopardized.
- To increase awareness and sharing of information relating to rental housing standards between existing and future rental property owners, property managers, landlords and tenants.

2) Who is exempt from this program?

There are two basic exemptions.

- 1) Exempt from the entire Rental Registration and Inspection Program (property owners renting out bedrooms in property they reside in); and
- 2) Properties exempt from the registration fee and safety inspection (but still required to register)

Complete list of exemptions and more information can be found [here](#). (actual web address is: <https://www.cob.org/services/housing/rentals/Pages/exemptions.aspx> but would like it to be hyperlinked on website.

REGISTRATION

3) Who needs to register?

Anyone who owns residential rental property within Bellingham city limits needs to register. This program applies to all types of residential rental properties: apartments, homes, duplexes, ADUs, etc.

Many rental properties have a Bellingham address, but are not within the city limits. If you are not sure whether your rental property is within Bellingham's city limits, please contact the RR&SIP program specialist at 360-778-8361.

4) How can the registration form be completed? And what happens once the property is registered?

The registration form can be found online at www.cob.org/rentals, and submitted via email to rentals@cob.org, in person at the Permit Center in Bellingham City Hall, or by mail.

The registration form will be reviewed and validated by the program specialist. Once that is complete, a certificate of registration will be sent to the primary contact for the property. A copy of this certificate must be posted in each rental unit in a visible location, or the property will be violation of the program.

Alternatives to posting the registration certificate in each unit:

Per BMC [6.15.040\(G\)](#), "A copy of the registration shall be posted on the inside of each residential housing unit in a visible location [...]" Alternatives to this requirement have been established by Director's rule and are as follows:

1. Include a copy of the registration certificate in the lease agreement and have tenants sign off that they have read and been provided a copy of the contents, and maintain the signed copy for the period of the lease; or
2. Tenants may sign an affidavit, which is then kept in their file concurrent with the term of the lease, that indicates they have been presented with a copy of the registration certificate and read its contents; or
3. In such rental properties as contain a central shared location that is accessible to tenants (such as a lobby, mail room, or leasing office), a copy of the registration certificate listing all applicable units may be posted there. This option must be employed in conjunction with either option #1 or option #2 (as detailed above).

**This list of alternatives to posting the Certificate of Registration can also be found at this link:*

<https://www.cob.org/services/housing/rentals/Pages/program-definitions.aspx>.

The property will also be added to the database of registered properties that is available to the public.

5) What is the process when a registered rental property is sold?

A rental registration is transferrable to any person who at any time has acquired ownership of a registered rental property. However, that rental registration is only valid for the unexpired portion of the calendar year for which it was issued. The new owner will be responsible for renewing the registration before it expires.

It is the homeowner's responsibility to notify the Rental Registration team of a change of ownership/primary contact. If we are not notified of a change of primary contact, we will continue to send correspondence to whoever was originally listed as the primary contact.

6) How long is a registration valid for?

Registrations are valid until the end of the calendar year in which they were completed. Renewal and repayment of fees must occur prior to the registration expiring.

INSPECTION

What is the inspection process?

Most non-exempt registered rental units will be required to be inspected once every three years. Property owners have the option to use a City of Bellingham inspector or a qualified private inspector. If you choose to use a Private Inspector, they must be on our Approved Private Inspector List, found here:

<https://www.cob.org/Documents/planning/housing/rentals/approved-private-inspectors.pdf>.

When a rental property is due for an inspection, the City will contact the property's primary contact person.

- If the registration indicated the preference for a **City Inspector**:
We will send you a scheduled inspection date and timeframe. When scheduling, the City will work to find a time that suits all involved parties. However, with the number of inspections that will need to be completed each year, scheduling flexibility will be limited.
- If the registration indicated the preference for a **Private Inspector**:
We will send you notification of the inspection quarter timeframe and documentation required, but it is up to the homeowner or property manager to schedule with the private inspector of their choosing.

Once an inspection for a rental unit has been scheduled, written notification of intent to allow an inspector to enter must be provided to the tenants of that unit per RCW 59.18.150(6). The notice must indicate the date & approximate time of the inspection and the name of the company or person performing the inspection. It must also indicate that the tenant has the right to see the inspector's identification before they enter the unit.

Inspectors will look at health and safety components, including: structural integrity; weather exposure; plumbing & sanitation; heat, water, and water facilities; ventilation systems; defective or hazardous electrical wiring and/or service; safe and functional exits; smoke & carbon monoxide detectors. These components are consistent with RCW 59.18.030 (1).

How much will an inspection cost?

Rental Inspection Fee Schedule

City Inspector (PER UNIT)	\$100.00
Private Inspector (PER UNIT)	\$45.00
First Reinspection (PER UNIT)	NO CHARGE
Second Reinspection (PER UNIT)	\$50.00
Final Reinspection (PER UNIT)	\$50.00
Missed Appointment	\$25.00

The inspection fee is charged per unit, NOT per property. If it is required to inspect three units at a rental property, the property owner will pay the inspection fee three times.

How often does a rental property need to be inspected?

Rental properties that are considered non-exempt will be required to be inspected once every three years.

Current RRSIP Inspection Zones & Projected Inspection Timeline (subject to change)

Inspection Zone 1	Timeline
Sehome	June - September 2016 (COMPLETED)
York	October - December 2016 (COMPLETED)
Happy Valley	January - May 2017 (CURRENT)
South Hill/Fairhaven/Edgemoore/South	June - August 2017

Inspection Zone 2	Timeline
Roosevelt	September - December 2017
Puget/Samish	January - March 2018

Alabama Hill/Silver Beach/Whatcom Falls	April - June 2018
Barkley/Irongate/King Mountain	July - September 2018

Inspection Zone 3	Timeline
City Center/Lettered Streets	November 2018 - January 2019
Sunnyland/Columbia	February - April 2019
Birchwood/Cornwall Park	May - July 2019
Meridian/Cordata	August - October 2019

If a property has more than one unit, will every unit be inspected every three years?

Not necessarily. For any rental properties that contain up to 20 units, no more than four total units will be inspected every three years. For rental properties with 21 or more units (in one or several buildings), no more than 20% of the total number of units (but not more than 50 total units) will be inspected every three years.

What components of a rental unit will be inspected?

Health and safety components, including: structural integrity; weather exposure; plumbing & sanitation; heat, water, and water facilities; ventilation systems; defective or hazardous electrical wiring and/or service; safe and functional exits; smoke & carbon monoxide detectors. These components are consistent with [RCW 59.18.030 \(1\)](#).

Mold will only be a component of inspection and remediation if, during inspection, it is determined to be a symptom of weather intrusion, plumbing leaks, or lack of ventilation. In the event that mold is determined to be caused by lifestyle, the City will only offer advice to the tenant in how to reduce or eliminate mold in their dwelling. The City will not be inspecting for lead paint and asbestos as these are generally not life safety concerns UNLESS they are introduced to air or water by way of removal or disturbance.

The inspection checklist has been made available to the public. The intent of this checklist is to provide a reasonable level of predictability for owners, residents and inspection personnel. No checklist can encompass every possible scenario and not all apparent violations present a threat to the health or safety of tenants. Accordingly, inspectors are required to use a significant amount of professional judgment.

What are the requirements of the notification to tenants?

Prior to the inspection occurring, written notification of intent to allow an inspector to enter must be provided to the tenants of that unit. According to [RCW59.18.150\(6\)](#) this must occur no less than 48 hours prior to the inspection date. The notice must indicate the date & approximate time of the inspection and the name of the company or person performing the inspection. It must also indicate that the tenant has the right to see the inspector's identification before they enter the unit.

What happens if a tenant denies the landlord/inspector access to the property?

Per [RCW59.18.150\(1\)](#), *"The tenant shall not unreasonably withhold consent to the landlord to enter into the dwelling unit in order to inspect the premises [...]"* A tenant who denies access to the property after the landlord has provided the two-days' written notice as required by RCW 59.18.150(6) will be subject to the penalties outlined in RCW 59.18.150(8).

TENANTS

How does this program benefit tenants?

Currently, tenants with complaints about unsafe living conditions need to file a Code Enforcement Investigation Request with the City. While this will continue to be an option, the RR&SIP creates a system to address and monitor rental property issues proactively without the need for a tenant to complain first.

Tenants can also have the peace of mind knowing that rental properties will be held to a certain standard for health and safety, outlined in the Rental Property Inspection Checklist. Rental property owners who do not comply with those standards will face penalties.

How can I find out if a rental property is registered?

A complete list of registered properties is available at this website or by contacting the Permit Center. If a rental property has a valid registration, a certificate of registration is required to be posted in every rental unit in a visible location.

Do not sign a lease for a rental property that has not registered with the RR&SIP. If you discover a rental property is not registered, notify the City by emailing rentals@cob.org or calling (360) 778-8361.

What do I need to know about the inspection process?

When your rental unit is scheduled for a safety [inspection](#), the owner or manager must provide proper written notice per RCW 59.18.150(6). You are allowed to ask to see the inspector's ID before they enter your unit. Denying access after proper notice has been given will result in the penalties outlined in RCW 59.18.150(8). Remember: the inspector is there looking out for your best interest!

Will this program affect my rent?

The City cannot anticipate what the impact of this new program may have on the rental market, but can provide information on the fees charged by the City to implement the program. This website will be continually updated to help tenants better understand the program's potential impact.

With a three-year inspection cycle, it might be a while before the property I am renting is inspected. If I currently have concerns health and safety items on the checklist that are present within my unit or on the property, what are my options?

If you feel there is an issue at the rental property that requires more immediate attention, file a [Code Enforcement Investigation Request](#) with the City.

How can tenants assist with the implementation of this program?

Tenants will play a vital role in the successful implementation of the RR&SIP and can assist in the following ways:

- Encourage the property owner or landlord to [register](#) the property;
- Learn about maintenance standards and notify the owner or landlord when things need to be fixed or are not up to standard; and
- Contact the City of Bellingham if the owner or landlord is not complying with the RR&SIP by either not registering or not meeting the maintenance standards.

EXEMPTIONS

Some rental housing units are exempt from all or portions of the RR&SIP.

The following rental housing units are exempt from the entire RR&SIP:

- Units unavailable for rent or outside the city limits;
- Accommodations in hotels, motels, inns or similar facilities for transient guests (except for units occupied by non-transient guests);
- Retirement or nursing homes and housing within any hospital or State licensed medical care facility, service care facility, convent, monastery or other housing occupied exclusively by members of a religious order;
- Mobile or manufactured homes (these fall within the jurisdiction of Washington State Labor and Industries); and
- Shelters for transitional housing.

The following rental housing units are required to register but are exempt from paying the registration fee and from inspection:

- Owner-occupied buildings containing two units;
- Units owned, operated or managed by a government agency or authority or are specifically exempted from a fee by state or federal law, however, once government ownership, operation or management ceases so does the exemption for fee payment;
- Rental units that receive funding or subsidies from federal, state or local government, and that are inspected at least once every three years as a condition of that funding; and
- Accessory dwelling units that are attached to a single family residential unit AND the owner of the property resides in either of those housing units.

What are "owner-occupied buildings containing two units"?

- A single family residence that the owner occupies with an accessory dwelling unit that is rented out;
- A single family residence with an accessory dwelling unit that the owners occupies;
- A single family residence that has been converted into two apartments, one of which the owner occupies; or
- A duplex in which the owner occupies one of the units.

Do I need to register if I am renting out bedrooms in the property I own and live in?

No, not as long as you are living at the property. If you ever move out and rent out the entire property, you will be required to register.