



WHITE PAPER

San Francisco Façade Inspection Ordinance And How Routine Cleaning Supports It

Who must comply with San Francisco's facade inspection program, the inspection deadlines by construction date, and how routine cleaning supports visibility without ever replacing a licensed inspection.

Executive Summary

San Francisco's Building Facade Inspection and Maintenance Program requires taller buildings to have their facades inspected by a California-licensed architect or engineer on a fixed schedule. Routine window and exterior cleaning can make facade conditions easier to see and keep owners attentive between inspections, but **cleaning is never an inspection and never a substitute for one**. This paper summarizes who must comply, the inspection cycle and the records owners should keep.

Key Points

- **Who:** Buildings five or more stories tall of Type I, II, III or IV construction. SF DBI
- **Who Inspects:** A California-licensed architect or engineer. SF DBI
- **Cycle:** An initial comprehensive report by a construction-date deadline, then every ten years. SF DBI
- **15+ Stories:** These buildings also need supplemental facade inspection reports. SF DBI
- **Cleaning Is Not Inspection:** A window cleaner is not the qualified professional the program requires.

Who Must Comply

According to SF.gov, the program "requires that all buildings that are five or more stories tall be regularly inspected by a California-licensed architect or engineer," with "additional inspection requirements for buildings that are fifteen or more stories tall." Covered buildings are five or more stories and of Type I, II, III or IV construction. Findings go in a written report to the Department of Building Inspection, and noncompliant conditions must be addressed. Detailed requirements are in San Francisco Existing Building Code Chapter 5F. SF DBI

Inspection Cycle

Tier	Construction Completed	Comprehensive Report Due	Supplemental (15+ Stories) Due
1	Before 1910	Dec 31, 2021	Dec 31, 2026
2	1910–1925	Dec 31, 2023	Dec 31, 2028
3	1926–1970	Dec 31, 2025	Dec 31, 2030
4	1971–1997	Dec 31, 2027	Dec 31, 2032
5	After 1997	Dec 31 of 30th year after Certificate of Final Completion	Apr 30, 2024

Source: SF.gov, DBI Facade Inspection and Maintenance Program.

After the initial report, a comprehensive report is due every ten years. Buildings 15 or more stories built after 1997 eventually alternate supplemental and comprehensive reports every five years. SF DBI A comprehensive report is "a general and detailed inspection of all building facades"; a supplemental report is "a general inspection of all facades." SF DBI

How Routine Cleaning Supports Visibility (Never A Substitute)

Dirt and staining can make it harder to see facade conditions. Regular cleaning keeps glass and cladding in a state where owners and their inspectors can see what is there, and a cleaning crew may notice something worth reporting to the owner. None of that meets the program's requirement for an inspection by a licensed architect or engineer. On taller buildings, any suspended or rope access cleaning is done by a vetted partner crew (see H12).

Owner Records

Record	Why
Comprehensive And Supplemental Reports Submitted To DBI	Program compliance
Repair Permits And Documentation	Needed for waiver requests and follow-up
Construction Completion Date / Tier	Sets deadlines
Cleaning Service Logs And Any Reported Observations	Helpful context for the inspector

SF.gov notes a waiver may be available for buildings that had a comprehensive inspection with necessary repairs in the 10 years before the due date, with documentation. [SF.gov](#)

Sources

- SF.gov, DBI Facade Inspection and Maintenance Program. <https://www.sf.gov/reports--june-2024--dbi-facade-inspection-and-maintenance-program>
- SF.gov, Submit Your Facade Inspection Report. <https://www.sf.gov/submit-your-facade-inspection-report>

This paper summarizes regulations and agency guidance for general information and is not legal advice. Requirements may change and vary by city; consult the current text, your local agency and qualified professionals.

About Window Cleaning Bay Area

Window Cleaning Bay Area provides commercial window cleaning, pressure washing and solar panel cleaning across the San Francisco Bay Area. Contact: grayson@windowcleaningbayarea.com