Pre-PPI Walkthrough Checklist

What to look at, touch, and test before you pay for an inspection.

Print this. Bring it to the lot. Check the boxes as you go.

KnowYourRV.com · RVInspecting.com

Federal recall + owner-complaint checks for used RV buyers

How to use this checklist

This is the walk-around you do before you spend $400 to $800 on a Pre-Purchase Inspection (PPI). The goal is to weed out obvious dealbreakers in 20 to 30 minutes, so you only pay an inspector to look at rigs that survive a basic gut check.

Every item here is something you can check yourself, with no tools more sophisticated than your phone, your nose, and a $5 outlet tester. Print this, bring it to the lot, and check off each item as you confirm it.

Walk-away signals

- Items in red — stop here. Don't pay for the PPI on this rig.

Negotiation leverage

- Items in amber — use these to negotiate price or repairs.

What only a pro inspector can verify

- Gray sections require tools you don't have. They're why the PPI exists.

What this catches

Roughly 60 to 70 percent of what a professional PPI finds — the things you can see, feel, smell, and test functionally. That's enough to weed out about three of every four problem rigs without paying for an inspection.

What this doesn't catch

The remaining 30 to 40 percent requires tools you don't have: moisture meters that read into wall cavities, propane leak detectors, transmission fluid analyzers, frame measurement, scan tools that pull stored fault codes. Once a rig passes this walkthrough, the PPI catches what you can't.

The full due-diligence stack

This walkthrough is one of three legs. The other two: a federal recall and owner-complaint check (knowyourrv.com — covered at the end of this document), and a professional Pre-Purchase Inspection from a certified RV inspector. Use all three on any rig you're seriously considering.

1.

Roof

Why this matters first: Roof failures are expensive and quiet. The damage is almost always older than the listing photos suggest.

Quick visual checks

- ☐ Walk eye-level around the rig and look at every roof seam where the roof meets a wall, vent, or AC unit.
- ☐ Look for caulk that's cracked, peeling, gapped, or freshly applied. Fresh caulk usually hides something.
- ☐ Check the membrane (rubber EPDM, TPO, or fiberglass) for tears, bubbles, separations, or aftermarket patches.
- ☐ Look at the rig from the side at a low angle in sunlight — sidewall delamination shows up as wavy spots in the wall directly below the roof.
- ☐ Stand inside and look up: water staining on the ceiling, especially around the AC, vents, and roof seams.
- ☐ Smell the rig with the windows closed for 30 seconds. Mildew is the giveaway.

Functional tests

- ☐ If the seller permits and the rig has a walkable roof, gently test for soft spots near the AC unit and roof vents. Soft underfoot means the wood underlayment is rotting.

Red flags — walk away

- Active water staining on interior ceilings.
- Spongy or soft roof underfoot.
- Visible delamination running across the sidewall.
- Strong mildew smell with the rig closed up.

Yellow flags — negotiation leverage

- Caulk that needs redoing ($200–400 in supplies, 1–2 days of work).
- Surface oxidation on a fiberglass roof.
- A few aftermarket patches that look intact but suggest history.

What the PPI catches that you can't

- Moisture meter readings into the wall cavities behind the wallpaper.
- Thermal imaging that finds delamination before it shows on the surface.
- About 30% of roof problems require these tools to detect.

2.

Slides

Why this matters: Slide-outs are the second-most expensive system after the roof. They fail at the seal, the mechanism, or the floor.

Quick visual checks

- ☐ Cycle each slide all the way out, then all the way in (with the seller's permission).
- ☐ Listen during operation: grinding, clicking, hesitation, or metal-on-metal are all warning signs.
- ☐ Check each slide topper (awning above each slide) for tears, sagging, or sun damage.
- ☐ Look at the slide seals — the rubber strips around the slide opening — for cracking, gaps, or compression set.
- ☐ With the slide retracted, walk inside and look at the slide floor for water staining or warping.
- ☐ Press the slide floor with a knee. Spongy spots mean water intrusion.

Functional tests

- ☐ Cycle each slide twice. The first cycle may seem fine; the second tells you if the motor is overheating or the hydraulic system is weak.

Red flags — walk away

- A slide that won't fully extend or fully retract.
- Active water staining inside the slide.
- Spongy floor inside the slide.
- Visibly damaged seal (a corner ripped or torn).

Yellow flags — negotiation leverage

- Slow operation (motor wear; replacement is $400–1,000).
- Slide topper that needs replacement ($300–600).
- Seal that's compressed but still intact.

What the PPI catches that you can't

- Slide alignment, frame integrity at the slide opening.
- Hydraulic pressure (if the slide is hydraulic).
- Motor amp draw under load — the early warning of a failing motor.

3.

Electrical

Why this matters: Most electrical issues are visible if you know where to look. The dangerous ones smell like burning plastic.

Quick visual checks

- ☐ Open every electrical panel cover: 12V breakers, 110V breakers, the converter, the inverter if equipped.
- ☐ Look for scorching, melted insulation, or burnt smell. All are walk-away signals.
- ☐ Inspect the shore power cord (30A or 50A) for arcing on the plug, exposed copper, or heat damage at the strain reliefs.
- ☐ Check the battery: cable corrosion, swelling, leaking, broken hold-down.
- ☐ Look at the converter and inverter for date codes. 10+ years is end of life.

Functional tests

- ☐ With the rig on shore power, test every outlet using a $5 GFCI outlet tester (Amazon, Klein RT250 or similar).
- ☐ Test the 12V system: every interior light, fan, water pump, slides, leveling jacks.
- ☐ Disconnect from shore power. Does anything drop out that shouldn't?
- ☐ AC unit: turn it on, time how long until cold air. Five minutes is normal; longer points to a compressor or refrigerant problem.
- ☐ Generator (if equipped): cold-start it, run it for 5 minutes, then run AC while the generator is running (load test).

Red flags — walk away

- Burnt smell anywhere, especially near the breaker panel or converter.
- AC that won't cool ($1,500–3,000 to replace).
- Generator that won't start or runs rough under load.
- Battery that won't hold a charge after sitting overnight.

Yellow flags — negotiation leverage

- Old battery (replacement $150–300).
- Worn shore cord ($150–200).
- A few dead bulbs or a broken switch.

What the PPI catches that you can't

- Polarity reversal in the wiring.
- Voltage drop under load on critical circuits.
- GFCI function on every outlet (not just whether it has power).
- Transfer switch behavior under load — important if the rig has a generator.

4.

Plumbing

Why this matters: Water damage is silent until it isn't. Look under every sink. Every time.

Quick visual checks

- ☐ Open every cabinet under sinks, in the bath, and in the wet bay. Look for water staining, soft wood, or musty smell.
- ☐ Check the water heater for corrosion at the bottom, scorching at the burner tube, or visible age (10+ years means soon).
- ☐ Inspect the fresh water tank, gray tank, and black tank for cracks or visible damage.
- ☐ Look at the toilet base: rocking means a bad seal; water at the base means an active leak.
- ☐ Look at every P-trap under the sinks for moisture or corrosion.

Functional tests

- ☐ Fill the fresh tank, run all faucets — cold first, then hot. Wait for hot water to actually arrive.
- ☐ Flush the toilet. Does the seal hold water afterward?
- ☐ Run the water heater on electric, then on propane. They're separate tests; either one can fail independently.
- ☐ Connect to city water with a regulator. Listen for the pump kicking on — it shouldn't with city water connected.
- ☐ Pull the gray tank dump valve briefly. Does it open and close cleanly?

Red flags — walk away

- Active leaks anywhere.
- Soft wood in plumbing bays — means the leak has been ongoing.
- Strong sewer smell (failed seal or a vent issue).
- Water heater that won't maintain pressure.

Yellow flags — negotiation leverage

- Old water heater ($400–700 with labor to replace).
- Anode rod overdue for replacement ($15 part, 30 minutes).
- Faucet aerators clogged with mineral buildup.

What the PPI catches that you can't

- Pressure test of the entire water system at spec.
- Propane line integrity test — a leak there is dangerous, not just expensive.
- Inaccessible plumbing runs in the floor and behind the walls.

5.

Structure & chassis

Why this matters: Frame and tire issues are the cheapest things to find and the most expensive things to fix. Spend extra time here.

Quick visual checks

- ☐ Walk around the entire rig at eye level, then again at knee level, with the sun behind you. Delamination shows up as ripples in the sidewall.
- ☐ Inspect the front and rear cap-to-sidewall joints for separation, cracking, or fresh caulk.
- ☐ Look at the underbelly: tears, sagging, exposed insulation, moisture stains.
- ☐ Check every tire for the DOT date code. The last 4 digits of the DOT stamp = WWYY of manufacture.
- ☐ Inspect the hitch, king pin, ball coupler, or pin box for cracks, bent components, or excessive wear.
- ☐ Look at the wheels for off-center wear (alignment), bent rims, or curb damage.
- ☐ Inspect leveling jacks: extend each, check for hydraulic leaks, retract cleanly.

Functional tests

- ☐ Engage and disengage each leveling jack. Operation should be quiet and even.
- ☐ With the rig leveled, walk through it. Does the floor feel even? Are the doors and cabinets aligned?

Red flags — walk away

- Tires older than 7 years from the DOT date — replace regardless of tread depth. RV tires age out before they wear out.
- Visible sidewall delamination across multiple panels.
- Frame rust at structural joints (not surface rust on a brace; rust at the joint itself).
- Bent or cracked hitch components.
- Sagging underbelly across multiple bays.

Yellow flags — negotiation leverage

- Cosmetic body damage.
- Stone chips on the front cap.
- Tires 5–7 years old (replacement coming).
- Slow leveling jacks (mechanical or hydraulic; usually fixable for $200–500).

What the PPI catches that you can't

- Frame straightness verified by measurement, not eyeball.
- Axle alignment.
- Weight distribution check — this matters more than people realize for towed rigs.
- Hidden rust inside the frame box section.

6.

Appliances

Why this matters: Appliances are individually replaceable. They're also a useful indicator of overall maintenance habits. A neglected fridge usually means a neglected rig.

Quick visual + functional

- ☐ Refrigerator: turn on at least 4 hours before viewing if you can arrange it. It should be at 40°F or below.
- ☐ Listen at the back of the fridge. Buzzing or constant clicking from the cooling unit means the unit is failing ($1,500–3,000 to replace).
- ☐ Test the fridge on electric AND on propane. They cool differently; failure on one mode tells you something specific.
- ☐ Stove: light each burner. Look for a steady blue flame, no yellow tips.
- ☐ Oven: light the pilot or igniter, hold a flame for 60 seconds.
- ☐ Microwave: heat a cup of water for 60 seconds. Is it hot?
- ☐ Furnace: turn the thermostat up. The furnace should fire within 30 seconds, the blower comes on, and warm air arrives.
- ☐ Awning: extend and retract. Check for rips, fading, or torn fabric.
- ☐ Washer/dryer (if equipped): run a full short cycle if the seller permits.

Red flags — walk away

- Refrigerator that won't cool on either power source.
- Furnace that won't ignite or runs without producing heat.
- Stove burners that smell of unburned propane after lighting.

Yellow flags — negotiation leverage

- Old appliances (10+ years on the fridge or microwave is end of life).
- Awning fabric that needs replacement ($300–600).
- Worn dryer venting.

What the PPI catches that you can't

- Internal cooling-unit diagnosis on absorption fridges.
- Gas leaks at every fitting — a propane leak detector goes farther than your nose.
- Combustion analysis on the furnace and water heater.

7.

Drivetrain

Skip this section if you're buying a travel trailer or 5th wheel. Drivetrain only applies to Class A, B, and C motorhomes.

Why this matters: A motorhome is a house on a vehicle. The vehicle half is everything in this section. Drive it. Don't just sit in it.

Quick visual checks

- ☐ Engine compartment: oil leaks, coolant leaks, cracked or glazed belts, bulging hoses.
- ☐ Transmission: leaks at the pan and the cooler lines. Pull the dipstick if accessible — color should be red, not brown; smell should be faintly sweet, not burnt.
- ☐ Underbody: exhaust integrity, drive shaft, U-joints, brake lines.

Functional tests — insist on a 30-minute drive minimum

- ☐ Cold start: should fire within 1–2 cranks. Rough start means battery, fuel, or starter.
- ☐ Idle: smooth and steady, no smoke, no vibration through the steering wheel.
- ☐ Drive 30+ minutes mixing city and highway.
- ☐ Hard stop from 30 mph in a safe area: no pull, no shake, no pulsation through the pedal.
- ☐ Steering: tracks straight, no wandering, no looseness in the wheel.
- ☐ Cruise control: engages, holds speed, disengages cleanly.
- ☐ Watch all temp gauges throughout: engine, transmission, exhaust if equipped.
- ☐ Dash air conditioning: cold air within 2 minutes.
- ☐ Listen for noises that come and go with speed (wheel bearings) or with steering input (CV joints, tie rods).

Red flags — walk away

- Oil or coolant leaks anywhere.
- Smoke at startup or under load.
- Transmission that slips or shifts harshly.
- Brake pulsation (warped rotors, $300–800) or pull (caliper issue).
- Overheating during the drive — cooling system or head gasket; both expensive.

Yellow flags — negotiation leverage

- High mileage relative to age (8,000–15,000 miles/year is normal; 5,000 or fewer means it sat too much).
- Maintenance records spotty or missing.
- Old shocks (motorhomes get rough rides as shocks age).

What the PPI catches that you can't

- Compression test on the engine.
- Transmission fluid analysis.
- Cooling system pressure test.
- Full alignment check.
- Chassis-system scan that pulls every stored fault code from the ECU.

Decision matrix

Based on what you found, here's the move.

What you found	What to do
Multiple red flags	Walk away. The next rig is out there.
One red flag, otherwise clean	Get the PPI to scope the repair cost. Then negotiate hard or walk.
All yellow flags, no reds	Get the PPI. Expect a few thousand in deferred maintenance. Offer accordingly.
Mostly clean	Get the PPI as final due diligence. Expect normal findings. Offer fair.

The full due-diligence stack

This walkthrough catches roughly 60 to 70 percent of what a professional Pre-Purchase Inspection finds. The remaining 30 to 40 percent requires moisture meters, propane testers, scan tools, and trained eyes — that's what a $400 to $800 PPI buys you. The two work together: this checklist tells you which rigs deserve the PPI dollars; the PPI catches what you can't.

Once you've narrowed your shortlist, run the federal recall and owner-complaint history on each candidate at knowyourrv.com — $19.99 for 20 comparisons over 30 days.

Walkthrough + federal record + PPI

= complete pre-purchase due diligence

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$19.99 · 20 comparisons · 30 days · no subscription

Now go look at some rigs.