Washington Squatters Rights: Adverse Possession and Removing Occupants

Summary for landlords and property managers. Last reviewed October 29, 2026. Full guide: https://www.generationadvisory.com/laws/washington-squatters-rights

Washington's general adverse possession period is ten years, shortened to seven for someone who pays the taxes under color of title. An owner can also ask police to remove a trespasser using a signed declaration.

Key points

- A claim to land by adverse possession generally requires ten years of open, continuous, exclusive and hostile possession.
- Someone in possession under color of title who pays all taxes for seven years in a row can claim sooner.
- Paying the taxes for seven years under color of title is generally the route to the shorter period; tax payment alone without a title document is not enough.
- An owner can sign a declaration asking police to remove a person who has no right to be on the property and was never a tenant, or can file an unlawful detainer case.

Washington at a glance

Rule	Washington	Law
Adverse possession period	A claim to land by adverse possession generally requires ten years of open, continuous, exclusive and hostile possession.	RCW 4.16.020
Claim under a document (color of title)	Someone in possession under color of title who pays all taxes for seven years in a row can claim sooner.	RCW 7.28.070
Paying property taxes	Paying the taxes for seven years under color of title is generally the route to the shorter period; tax payment alone without a title document is not enough.	RCW 7.28.070
How owners remove occupants	An owner can sign a declaration asking police to remove a person who has no right to be on the property and was never a tenant, or can file an unlawful detainer case.	Revised Code of Washington, Title 9A (criminal trespass) and RCW 59.12

Mistakes to avoid

- Waiting months to act after someone moves in.
- Changing locks or removing belongings yourself.
- Accepting rent or utility payments from the occupant.
- Leaving a vacant property unchecked for long stretches.

Verify current law

Laws named in this summary:

- RCW 4.16.020
- RCW 7.28.070
- Revised Code of Washington, Title 9A (criminal trespass) and RCW 59.12
- RCW 59.12 and RCW 59.18
- RCW 59.18.290 and RCW 59.18.300

Official sources:

- Revised Code of Washington (Washington State Legislature): https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/
- Washington State Department of Commerce: HB 1217 landlord resource center: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/housing-policy/hb1217-landlord-resource-center/
- Washington Courts: https://www.courts.wa.gov/

> General information, not legal advice. Check current law and talk to a Washington attorney before you act. Last reviewed October 29, 2026.