Incoming Inspection: Ensuring Quality and Completeness at the Point of Acceptance

Incoming inspection is the systematic check of delivered goods and services directly upon acceptance at the site. It ensures that the quantity, identity, quality and documentation of the delivery match the order before the goods are transferred to stock. For buyers and supply chain managers, it is a central control point that significantly influences payment release, complaint management and supplier evaluation.

As of October 2026 · amplifa-marketplace.ai/en/glossary/wareneingangspruefung

Key facts at a glance

01 Incoming inspection checks deliveries for identity, quantity, quality and accompanying documents such as delivery notes, certificates and inspection reports.

02 It is a prerequisite for releasing invoice processing and protects against payments for incomplete or defective deliveries.

03 In practice, three levels of inspection depth have become established: visual spot check, complete individual inspection and sampling using recognised sampling procedures.

04 The results typically feed into supplier evaluation and support supplier development plans and quality audits at the supplier.

05 Digitalised goods receipt with scanning, app-based inspection and automatic matching reduces lead times and improves traceability.

06 With quality agreements, such as a quality assurance agreement, the scope and methods of incoming inspection are contractually regulated.

Definition: Incoming Inspection

Incoming inspection comprises all inspection and documentation steps carried out upon acceptance of a delivery at the receiving facility, before the goods are transferred to stock. It marks, both legally and

procedurally, the transfer of responsibility from the supplier to the recipient and forms the basis for later defect claims.

Distinction from mere goods receipt

Goods receipt initially refers only to the physical receipt and accounting posting of the delivery. Incoming inspection goes beyond this: it is the substantive check of whether the delivered goods comply with the order, the specifications and the agreed conditions. Only after a passed inspection is the goods released, quarantined or complained about.

Legal classification

Under sales law, the buyer is subject to duties of inspection and notification: recognizable defects must generally be reported without delay after discovery, hidden defects within a reasonable period. The specific deadlines depend on the contract and the industry and should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. A documented incoming inspection secures evidence and protects the buyer's claims.

Scope and Methods of Incoming Inspection

The scope of inspection is determined by the criticality of the material, supplier performance and economic effort. Not every delivery warrants the same inspection depth – a risk-based graduated approach saves costs without jeopardising security of supply.

Identity, quantity and document checks

First, it is verified whether the delivered goods match the order: article number, material designation, batch number and quantity. Accompanying documents such as delivery notes, inspection certificates, material certificates, customs papers – for example for consignments with an ATA carnet – as well as declarations of conformity are checked for completeness and consistency. Discrepancies are documented immediately.

Quality and functional inspection

Depending on the material, visual inspection, dimensional inspection, material testing or functional tests are used. For critical parts, a quality assurance agreement with the supplier often governs the inspection characteristics, measuring equipment and documentation obligations. Sampling plans define how many units are inspected per lot; typically recognised AQL-based sampling procedures are used.

Aligning inspection depth with risk

In practice, three levels have become established: pure receipt control with document matching for simple standard parts, sampling inspection for regular series parts and complete incoming inspection for safety-critical or process-critical goods and initial deliveries. After parts are re-launched – for example following prototype procurement or tool changes – an increased inspection depth is often agreed.

Process and Organisation in the Receiving Area

A clearly structured process prevents inspected and uninspected goods from being mixed or complaints from going astray. Responsibilities, thresholds and escalation routes must be fixed in writing.

Standard process from acceptance to release

The typical process: acceptance and weighing against the delivery note, unloading and allocation to the order, document check, physical inspection according to the inspection plan, then a decision on release, quarantine stock or complaint. Quarantined stock is clearly labelled and physically stored separately until the decision is made.

Roles and competencies

Warehouse and receiving staff carry out identity and quantity checks, while qualified inspectors or a testing laboratory perform the technical quality control. Procurement is involved in complaints, supplier discussions and deviation releases. Clear responsibilities avoid friction between planning, quality and warehousing.

Embedded in procurement processes

Incoming inspection is the endpoint of a chain that begins with the demand notification and extends through the sourcing process to delivery. Results from receiving feed back into supplier evaluation and influence future award scenarios as well as a supplier's position in the preferred supplier policy.

Key KPIs of Incoming Inspection

Without metrics, inspection remains a ritual rather than a steering instrument. Typically measured are delivery quality, lead times and inspection costs.

Quality and delivery metrics

The most important metrics are the supplier's delivery performance in per cent on-time and complete deliveries as well as the defect rate per million parts delivered. The complaint rate and the time from defect notification to supplier response are also frequently tracked. These figures feed supplier scorecards and the Kraljic matrix for portfolio structuring.

Process and efficiency metrics

The focus is on lead time from receipt to availability in stock, the proportion of deliveries released within one day and inspection costs per receipt. Companies with a high degree of automation report a significantly increased touchless rate in the receiving process, i.e. the proportion of fully automated deliveries handled without manual intervention.

Impact on procurement objectives

Stable incoming quality reduces rework and scrap costs and thus the actual savings of a project – measured, for example, as savings realised. Those who document defects systematically can differentiate reliably in the next sourcing round via the weighting matrix and factor quality risks into price negotiations.

Risks, Typical Errors and Controls

The most common errors arise from time pressure, missing inspection specifications and unclear responsibilities. Effective controls target exactly these points.

Typical sources of error

Common problems: formal checks without genuine quality inspection, undocumented sampling, late defect notifications with loss of claims, mixing of quarantined and released stock, and lack of feedback from receiving to procurement. Incomplete certificates are still far too rarely consistently challenged in practice.

Controls and prevention

Effective levers include written inspection instructions per material group, trained staff with defined competence levels, the four-eyes principle for releases of critical parts, and systematic supplier discussions in the event of repeated deviations. Quality assurance agreements contractually transfer inspection scope and liability to the supplier in a binding manner.

Supplier development instead of mere inspection

With recurring defects, mere inspection is expensive. A supplier development plan with joint root cause analyses, process improvements at the supplier and regular quality audits sustainably reduces the defect rate. In addition, supplier de-risking through dual sourcing and risk-based inspection strategies supports security of supply.

Current Developments: Digitalisation and Automated Incoming Inspection

Digitalisation is transforming the receiving area significantly: barcodes, scanning, mobile inspection apps and AI-based image recognition are increasingly replacing paper lists and manual records.

Automation and system support

ERP and warehouse management systems automatically match order data, delivery notes and scanned documents and generate electronic goods receipt documents. Invoice processing can be linked directly to the confirmed goods receipt. Image recognition supports labelling, surface inspection and completeness detection in practice with growing reliability.

Risk-based inspection using supplier data

Suppliers with consistently stable quality over many years can be relieved through reduced inspection depth, while new or conspicuous suppliers are inspected more rigorously. Such risk-based models draw on data from quality audits, complaints and supplier evaluations. The reshoring trend also increases the focus on flexible receiving structures, as domestic supply chains mean shorter but more frequent deliveries.

Integration into certified management systems

In certified quality management systems, incoming inspection is an audited core process element. Traceability, up-to-date training records and version-controlled inspection instructions are subject to external audits. Electronic systems considerably facilitate this evidence.

Typical metrics

Metric	Typical value
On-time delivery (OTIF)	> 95% *Proportion of on-time and complete deliveries; industry values vary*
Defect rate per million parts	< 50 PPM *Benchmark for series parts in series production*
Inspection lead time	< 24 h *Time from receipt to release; longer for critical parts*
Touchless rate	60–80% *Proportion of fully automated receipts with high digitalisation*
Complaint processing time	< 10 working days *From defect notification to supplier statement*

Practical example: Mechanical engineering company digitalises incoming inspection

A mid-sized mechanical engineering company with around 200 employees struggled with long lead times in receiving: parts sat uninspected for days, invoices could not be released and complaints fizzled out in emails. The company introduced a structured receiving concept with digital inspection recording.

- Risk classes defined for all material groups: sampling for standard parts, full inspection for safety-relevant components
- Mobile inspection app introduced with photo documentation; deviations automatically trigger a complaint case with deadlines
- Supplier scorecards fed from receipt data; two suppliers with recurring defects placed on a supplier

development plan

- Invoice release linked to digitally confirmed goods receipt; inspection lead times fell noticeably, which the company internally assessed as a significant improvement

Conclusion

Incoming inspection is far more than a customs formality at the loading dock: it is the last control point before stock transfer and invoice release, and a valuable source of data for supplier management. Those who graduate inspection depth by risk, clearly define responsibilities and systematically evaluate results reduce rework costs and strengthen their negotiating position. Digitalised inspection processes make the check faster, more verifiable and audit-ready. Ultimately, a structured incoming inspection directly contributes to procurement objectives such as quality, delivery reliability and genuine savings.

Frequently asked questions

? What does incoming inspection involve?

Incoming inspection includes identity and quantity checks against the order and delivery note, verification of accompanying documents such as certificates and inspection reports, and qualitative inspection of the goods depending on the agreed inspection depth. Results are documented and lead to release, quarantine stock or a complaint.

? When must incoming inspection take place?

The inspection should be carried out immediately after acceptance of the delivery, as buyers generally must give notice of recognizable defects promptly in order to preserve their claims. Specific deadlines arise from the contract, the general terms and conditions and the applicable sales law and should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

? Who is responsible for incoming inspection?

Operational responsibility typically lies with the goods receiving or warehouse area for quantity and document checks, while qualified inspectors or quality assurance carry out the technical inspection. Procurement is involved in complaints, supplier discussions and deviation decisions. Responsibilities should be defined in writing.

? How does sampling inspection differ from full inspection?

In sampling inspection, a statistically defined portion of the lot is inspected, usually using recognised AQL procedures; it is economical but carries a residual risk. Full inspection checks every unit and is used for safety-critical parts, initial deliveries or after defects have become known.

? Which documents are checked at goods receipt?

As standard: delivery note, order confirmation, where applicable sales order confirmation, inspection certificates and material certificates, declarations of conformity and, for imports, customs and origin documents. For perishable or dangerous goods, additional documents such as

temperature logs or dangerous goods papers are required.

? How can incoming inspection be digitalised?

Standard elements include barcodes and scanning for identification, mobile inspection apps with photo and measurement documentation, and automatic matching of order, delivery note and certificates in the ERP system. Linking to invoice processing and supplier evaluation makes the process seamless and audit-ready.

Find the right suppliers on Amplifa

Verified industrial suppliers in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Describe your requirement and receive comparable offers.

amplifa-marketplace.ai