NDTIntel

Pricing

NDT Inspection Rate Guide 2026

Real pricing data — hourly rates, per-weld costs, and hidden charges across every major NDT method

- Hourly and per-test rates for UT, RT, MT, PT, ET, and VT
- Rates by industry sector and geographic region
- Hidden fees to watch for (mobilization, film, reports, standby time)
- How to negotiate better rates with NDT service providers

How NDT Inspection Billing Works

NDT inspection billing varies dramatically by method, complexity, and billing model. Some methods are priced per hour, others per weld or per test. Understanding the billing structure for each method is the first step to controlling inspection costs on your next turnaround, construction project, or in-service inspection campaign.

Billing Model Overview

Billing Model	Typical Methods	Description
Hourly rate	MT, PT, VT, ET	Technician time on-site, portal-to-portal or productive hours only
Per weld / per joint	UT, RT	Charged per weld inspected — rate varies by diameter and wall thickness
Per shot / per exposure	RT (radiography)	Per film or digital exposure, plus consumables
Per linear foot / meter	UT (corrosion scanning), ET	Long-seam welds, pipe corrosion mapping
Day rate	All methods (turnarounds)	Full-day rate for dedicated technician during shutdowns
Project / lump sum	Multi-method campaigns	Fixed price for defined scope — common on large capital projects

Quick Budget Reference — Single Technician Rates

- Level II UT Technician (hourly): $85–$175/hr
- Level II RT Technician (hourly): $95–$200/hr + consumables
- Level II MT/PT Technician (hourly): $75–$140/hr
- Level III Consultant/Supervisor: $150–$400/hr
- Day rate (10-hr shift, Level II): $850–$2,000/day

Rates by NDT Method

Cost Breakdown by Inspection Method

NDT Method	Typical Hourly Rate	Per-Weld/ Per-Test Cost	Equipment/ Consumable Add-Ons	Best For
Ultrasonic Testing (UT)	$85–$175/ hr	$15–$75 per weld	Couplant, calibration blocks — minimal	Weld inspection, thickness measurement, flaw detection
Phased Array UT (PAUT)	$125–$250/hr	$40–$150 per weld	Encoder, scanner — included in rate	Complex geometries, code-compliant sizing
Radiographic Testing (RT)	$95–$200/ hr	$10–$40 per shot (film)	Film, processing, darkroom: $5–$15/ shot	Volumetric weld inspection, castings, code compliance
Digital Radiography (DR/ CR)	$125–$275/hr	$15–$50 per exposure	Imaging plates, reader — included in rate	Faster results, no film processing
Magnetic Particle (MT)	$75–$140/ hr	$8–$25 per test area	Yoke, particles, UV lamp: $2–$5/test	Surface/near-surface cracks in ferromagnetic materials
Liquid Penetrant (PT)	$75–$130/ hr	$5–$20 per test area	Penetrant, developer, cleaner: $2–$4/test	Surface cracks in any non-porous material
Eddy Current (ET)	$90–$175/ hr	$10–$40 per tube/test	Probes, calibration standards	Heat exchanger tubing, surface cracks, conductivity
Visual Testing (VT)	$65–$120/ hr	N/A (time-based)	Borescope rental: $200–$500/day extra	Weld profile, corrosion, general condition
Time-of-Flight Diffraction (TOFD)	$150–$300/hr	$50–$200 per weld	Scanner, encoder — included in rate	Critical weld sizing, code-compliant flaw characterization

Rates reflect 2025–2026 market data for third-party NDT service providers in the continental US.

Key Rule of Thumb

Radiographic testing costs 2–3x more than ultrasonic testing for the same weld when you factor in consumables, safety exclusion zones, and processing time. RT is slower but remains code-required for many applications. Always confirm which code governs your inspection before assuming UT is acceptable.

Rates by Industry Sector

Per-method pricing varies significantly by industry due to code requirements, safety protocols, and access complexity.

Industry	Primary Methods	Typical Rate Premium	Key Cost Drivers
Oil & Gas (Upstream/ Midstream)	UT, RT, MT, TOFD	Base to +25%	Remote locations, pipeline spread work, API 1104/ASME B31.3 codes
Oil & Gas (Downstream/ Refining)	UT, PAUT, MT, ET, VT	+10–30%	Turnaround time pressure, confined space, hot permits
Aerospace	UT, ET, PT, RT	+25–50%	NAS 410 certification required, tighter acceptance criteria
Power Generation (Nuclear)	UT, RT, ET, VT	+30–60%	NRC oversight, ASNT SNT-TC-1A + plant-specific quals, security clearances
Power Generation (Fossil/Renewable)	UT, MT, PT, VT	Base to +15%	Boiler tube inspection, stack/tower access
Structural Steel / Construction	UT, MT, RT	Base rate	AWS D1.1 code, new construction accessibility
Pipeline (Transmission)	UT, RT, AUT	+10–25%	Remote/rural locations, DOT/PHMSA oversight, per-diem costs
Manufacturing / Fabrication	UT, RT, MT, PT	Base rate	In-shop inspection, production schedule pressure

Aerospace Premium Explained

Aerospace NDT commands the highest rates because NAS 410 certification requirements are significantly more demanding than SNT-TC-1A. NAS 410 requires 400 hours of OJT for Level II (vs. 210 hours under SNT-TC-1A), plus formal classroom training and employer-specific written practice. Fewer technicians qualify, and demand exceeds supply.

Rates by Region

Region	Rate Range (Level II, hourly)	Per Diem	Key Notes
Gulf Coast (TX, LA)	$85–$150/hr	$100–$175/day	Highest volume market; competitive rates due to technician density
California	$110–$200/hr	$150–$225/day	Higher labor costs, stricter state regulations
Northeast (PA, NJ, NY, New England)	$100–$185/hr	$125–$200/day	Refinery corridor; nuclear facilities drive premiums
Midwest (OH, IN, IL, MI)	$80–$145/hr	$100–$150/day	Manufacturing base; moderate rates
Rocky Mountain / Plains	$90–$160/hr	$125–$200/day	Pipeline corridor; remote location premiums
Pacific Northwest (WA, OR)	$95–$170/hr	$125–$175/day	Aerospace (Boeing supply chain), hydro power
Southeast (AL, GA, SC, NC)	$80–$140/hr	$100–$150/day	Growing nuclear + petrochemical; competitive
Alaska / Offshore	$150–$300/hr	$200–$350/day	Extreme premium for remote/harsh environment

Gulf Coast Advantage

The Houston–Beaumont–Lake Charles corridor has the highest concentration of NDT firms in the country. Competition keeps rates 15–25% below coastal and remote markets for equivalent work. If your project scope allows, sourcing Gulf Coast-based firms for travel work can yield significant savings.

Hidden Fees & Add-Ons

Always request an itemized, all-inclusive quote. The hourly or per-weld rate is rarely the final number. Budget 25–40% above base inspection rates for add-ons and mobilization.

Add-On	Typical Cost	When It Applies
Mobilization / demobilization	$500–$5,000+	Every project — travel, lodging, vehicle, equipment transport
Per diem (technician)	$100–$350/day	Multi-day projects away from home base
Overtime (>8 hrs or weekends)	1.5x–2x hourly rate	Turnarounds, shutdowns, emergency callouts
Emergency / after-hours callout	$500–$1,500 minimum	Unplanned inspections, equipment failures
RT safety support (radiation safety officer)	$75–$150/hr	Required for all radiographic work; some firms bundle, others bill separately
Film / imaging consumables	$5–$15 per shot	Radiographic testing only; digital eliminates this
Report writing / documentation	$50–$100/hr or 10–20% of inspection cost	Formal reports beyond standard data sheets
Rope access / scaffolding standby	$150–$400/hr per team	Elevated or confined-space inspections
Equipment rental (specialized)	$200–$2,000/day	PAUT scanners, crawlers, borescopes, drones
Radiation badges / dosimetry	$15–$50 per technician/ month	RT personnel monitoring
Standby / wait time	$50–$100/hr	When technician is on-site but unable to work (permits, access delays)
Third-party Level III review	$150–$400/hr	Independent interpretation and procedure development
Calibration verification	$100–$500 per instrument	Annual or project-specific calibration certificates

Request a quote that separates mobilization, labor (productive hours vs. portal-to-portal), consumables, per diem, and report costs. A combined "day rate" that bundles everything sounds simple but makes it impossible to compare vendors or audit overcharges.

How to Negotiate Better NDT Rates

Numbered list

1. **Bundle methods and scope.** Combining UT, MT, and VT into a single mobilization saves 30–50% vs. scheduling each method separately. NDT firms prefer larger scopes — give them a reason to sharpen their pencil.

2. **Commit to volume or a term contract.** Annual inspection contracts with guaranteed minimums typically yield 15–25% discounts over spot-market rates. Most firms offer tiered pricing at 500, 1,000, and 2,500+ hour thresholds.

3. **Choose standard turnaround for reports.** Rush reporting (24-hour) adds 25–50%. If you don't need results before the next shift, standard 3–5 day reporting saves significantly.

4. **Provide safe, ready access.** Scaffolding erected, insulation removed, surfaces cleaned, and permits in hand before the NDT crew arrives. Standby time at $50–$100/hr adds up fast.

5. **Compare Level II vs. Level III billing.** Level III rates are 2x or higher. Use Level II technicians for routine inspection and reserve Level III hours for procedure development, interpretation disputes, and code consultations.

6. **Evaluate digital radiography (DR) vs. film.** DR eliminates consumable costs ($5–$15/shot), darkroom processing, and film storage. Higher hourly rate but lower all-in cost for high-volume work.

7. **Get three quotes with identical scopes.** Pricing variation within the same market can be 40–60%. Write a clear scope of work with weld counts, methods, code requirements, and access conditions so quotes are truly comparable.

8. **Negotiate mobilization separately.** Some firms bury high mobilization charges in per-weld rates. Others charge a flat mob/demob fee. Separating it lets you optimize — especially if you can provide local lodging or schedule around other nearby projects.

9. **Consider in-house for high-volume repetitive work.** If you're spending $200K+/year on routine UT thickness surveys or MT inspections, training and certifying in-house Level I/II technicians may be more cost-effective.

10 **Avoid emergency callout premiums.** Plan inspections during scheduled maintenance windows. Emergency callouts carry $500–$1,500 minimums plus overtime rates. A $150/hr inspection becomes $400/hr at 2 AM on a Saturday.

Budget Planning Worksheet

Use this worksheet to estimate total NDT inspection costs for your project or turnaround. Print and fill in for each scope.

Line Item	Estimated Cost	Actual Cost
Mobilization / demobilization	$_____	$_____
Per diem (technicians x days)	$_____	$_____
UT inspection (hours or welds x rate)	$_____	$_____
RT inspection (shots x rate + consumables)	$_____	$_____
MT / PT inspection (hours x rate)	$_____	$_____
ET inspection (tubes or hours x rate)	$_____	$_____
PAUT / TOFD (hours or welds x rate)	$_____	$_____
VT inspection (hours x rate)	$_____	$_____
Rope access / scaffolding	$_____	$_____
Overtime / weekend premium	$_____	$_____
Report writing / Level III review	$_____	$_____
Equipment rental (specialized)	$_____	$_____
Radiation safety / dosimetry	$_____	$_____
Standby / wait time estimate	$_____	$_____
25% contingency buffer	$_____	$_____
TOTAL ESTIMATED	$_____	$_____

Complete this worksheet before requesting quotes. Knowing your full scope — weld count, methods required, code references, access conditions, and schedule — helps you get accurate all-in pricing and avoid surprise charges.

CTA box

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