

OWNER BRIEFINGS!

Would you like to know more about the Section 8 rent assistance program but don't know who to ask? Metro HRA can help. We are offering ongoing briefings to provide Landlords/ Property Managers with valuable information about the Section 8 program. These briefings offer owners/managers an opportunity to see what is new, ask questions, and network with other property owners. The briefings last approximately one hour and are offered quarterly on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at Metro HRA, 390 North Robert St., St. Paul. Upcoming briefings are as follows:

- **May 11, 2016 2 PM**
- **August 10, 2016 2 PM**
- **November 8, 2016 2 PM**

For more information or to register contact Mary D at mary.d-hra@metc.state.mn.us or **651-602-1445**.

COMMUNITY CHOICE

Community Choice is an initiative of the Metropolitan Council and a service offered through Metropolitan Council's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (Metro HRA). Community Choice assists families with Housing Choice Vouchers locate and secure housing in a community of their choice that will provide them with the tools they need for success, prosperity and quality of life.

What are the benefits offered by Community Choice?

Through Community Choice, families will complete tenant education training and work with their counselor to identify and address potential barriers to successful residency. Community Choice provides access to security deposit assistance and provides timely payments to landlords.

In an effort to ensure family success in their new community, counselors conduct home visits at least

four times a year. During the visit, counselors will be able to address any property or housekeeping issues; protecting your asset! As an owner, the mobility counselors will be with you every step of the way. Participating landlords and families will have direct contact with counselors to address concerns. The program's success will be dependent on a strong three-way partnership between property owners, mobility counselors, and HCV participants.

Who is eligible?

Eligibility is available to property owners with rental units in opportunity areas.

Who do I contact for additional information?

To find out if your property qualifies- please contact either one of our mobility counselors at the information below: Corina S. corina.s-hra@metc.state.mn.us or 651-602-1869

Terry H. terry.h-hra@metc.state.mn.us or 651-602-1952

A Newsletter for Housing Owners

METRO HRA
Housing & Redevelopment Authority

VIEWS



GO GREEN WITH ASSISTANCE CHECK

For your convenience, we are offering a secure, online service called AssistanceCheck. This convenient service allows you to contact us and make requests online rather than in-person, by phone or by mail. Some of the services offered include:

- Update your contact information
- Reschedule Inspections
- View and Print required documents
- View and print HAP Statements

You should have received a letter in the mail with your account PIN and easy setup instructions.

When using Assistancecheck to ask questions be sure to include enough information, such as the client name or address of the property you are asking about. Giving us enough information upfront will help us to help you quicker.

If you need help setting up your account or have questions you can contact Tammy P @651-602-1525, or Mary D @651-602-1445.

You can also access owner information at www.metrohra.org.

FAIR HOUSING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Twin Cities Public Television and ECHO Minnesota teamed up with collaborating partners, including the Metropolitan Council, to produce a multilingual video on the basics of fair housing in Minnesota. The program, "A Good, Safe to Live" was newly released on April 4, 2016.

Finding safe, affordable rental housing can be a challenge, especially for tenants with limited English and immigrants and refugees dealing with language and cultural barriers. To help new Minnesotans understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants, short videos were produced in five languages covering the basics of tenants and landlord rights and obligations. The languages include Hmong, Karen, Somali, Spanish and English.

The Metro HRA's website includes a fair housing page where you will find these videos and other information about fair housing.

<http://metro council.org/Housing/Services/Metro-HRA-Rental-Assistance/Fair-Housing.aspx?source=child>

SPRING 2016

FREE ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITY *

Do you have a vacancy to rent?

Housing Link is the primary distributor of affordable housing information in the Twin Cities. The Housing Link online listing service is easy to use and it is FREE. The website is viewed by almost 35,000 people each month and used to list vacancies by over 6,000 landlords. Get the word out through Housing Link! Visit www.housinglink.org, Click on the landlord link and advertise your affordable housing vacancies today.

This website also provides current Payment Standard and Utility Allowance information for the Twin Cities area Housing Authorities.

IS THERE SOMETHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW?

If there are topics you would like to see addressed in upcoming issues of the newsletter, please e-mail them to Mary D at mary.d-hra@metc.state.mn.us.

If there is one tool you should have, one article you should read, it's this one.

We'll look at four main topics for each alarm: types, power, location, and maintenance. After you're finished reading this article, you'll hopefully be more educated and informed. Some of you will also hopefully be scared enough to pay attention to this small, seemingly insignificant watch dog - standing guard in your home, only complaining when it needs its battery changed. Even then, still protecting you by letting you know.

Some statistics of interest:

On average each year in the United States since 1977...

- **There has been an average of over 480,000 fires**
- **3700 deaths**
- **17,000 injuries**
- **In 2014 alone...**
 - The US responded to a fire every 24 seconds
 - One home structure fire was reported every 86 seconds
 - One civilian fire injury was reported every 33 minutes
 - One civilian fire death occurred every 2 hours and 41 minutes



Fire happens all the time, every day, every minute.

Smoke alarm types. You walk into your favorite hardware store, and are met with an aisle full of alarms with fancy terms on the package such as ion, photo electric, piezo, dual, lithium, and the list goes on. It's overwhelming if you don't know the terminology and the differences. More confusing, why are there so many different kinds? How do I know if I'm getting the best kind, and will it protect me? I can't make an informed decision so I walk away. No! Stop! Any alarm is better than none at all! Remember that.

There are two main types of ways a smoke alarm can sense smoke: **ionization and photo electric**. An **ionization** alarm has a small amount of radioactive material between two small plates which have electricity flowing through it. That little green light on the alarm does not mean it glows in the dark, it's a very small amount of (safe) radioactive material. This material ionizes the air and allows current to flow between the two plates. If smoke gets between these plates, it stops the flow of ions, thus reducing the flow of current and activating the alarm. A **photo electric alarm** looks for an obstruction of light entering a chamber. This can either be accomplished by smoke obstructing the light, or scattering the light. Either way, a light source, usually an LED, shines in a "chamber" and if smoke gets inside, and the light receiver on the other end detects a change from "normal" it sounds the alarm.

The difference is that one may respond sooner to different types of fires. Generally speaking, there are two types of fires: **Smoldering and flaming**. A **smoldering** fire tends to produce more smoke quicker and with larger particles, thus a photo electric alarm is faster to respond. A **flaming** fire usually produces less smoke and much smaller particles, so an **ionization** alarm is going to detect a flaming fire faster.

Fortunately, you can purchase both kinds of alarms, and better yet, you can get both sensor types in the same alarm. The best smoke alarm is going to be a dual sensor. The packaging will always tell you what type of sensor the alarm is.

Smoke alarm power source. Now that you've figured out what type of alarm you should buy, you're faced with the decision of how the alarm is powered. Let's break it down into two categories: **Battery and hardwired**. **Battery** alarms have a battery that goes inside. When the battery starts to get low, it'll start beeping and nagging you to change it. If I had a dollar for every alarm I've encountered with the low battery alarm indicator sounding, I'd be able to retire. That beep is annoying - it's supposed to be. I always tell a tenant that the things that are most annoying can save your life...! Some alarms now have a 10 year lithium ion battery. The greatest thing about that is you don't change a battery, and no one can take it out and put it in the TV remote. Genius!

Hardwired alarms are wired right into the home electrical system. In the event of a fire, the power to the home will most likely stay on long before the wires burn up. It also retires the need for a battery to keep it working in the event the backup battery is dead or removed. Another great option for a hardwired smoke alarm is they can all be interconnected so they talk to each other. This is especially helpful with multi-level homes. If one alarm senses smoke, it signals all the alarms to sound. Hardwired alarms are code in most cities for new construction and remodels. Going further, most cities require a hardwired alarm to have a battery backup. It's nearly impossible to purchase a hardwired alarm without battery backup. There are a few choices for the power source of your smoke alarms. The best alarm is going to be hardwired, with interconnection between all other alarms with a battery backup. Even if that isn't possible, a simple battery powered one will still meet the needs of protection.

Smoke alarm location. Just as in real estate, it's all about location. We'll start with where you should **not** put a smoke alarm, some of these locations may surprise you. Kitchens, garages, bathrooms, or any place where a lot of dust or chemical fumes are going to be present. Installing a smoke alarm in these locations can create false alarms to the point where the occupant just gets annoyed and rips it off the wall or ceiling. Also, it can degrade the sensing capability of the alarm to the point that it may not even work.

Smoke alarm placement can be confusing. Why do some places only have one just outside the bedroom, while other places have them inside the bedroom? The short of it is, laws have changed over the years. Over time, more alarms have been required, and more emphasis on fail safe or redundant features have become standard. Metro HRA has their own set of standards. At least one on each level unless it's a crawl space or unused attic. The alarm must be at a minimum, installed just outside the sleeping area, generally 10 feet maximum.

Furthermore, there are rules on where the smoke alarm can be attached on the wall or ceiling. The diagram below best explains where you can and cannot install an alarm. All smoke alarms should be located at the highest possible point in a room. The reasoning is that smoke rises to the top, and works its way down. If an alarm is located too low on a wall, the fire may have already overtaken the occupants by the time smoke fills the room enough that the particles reach the alarm. This is also true in the corners of the room. The "dead zone" is due to the arch created as smoke fills a room. Keep the alarm out of the dead zone. Lastly, don't place an alarm within 3 feet of a vent. This could also cause the alarm not to go off because smoke is either drawn past it, or blown away from it. Best practice is place the alarm nearest the center of the room on the ceiling.

Smoke alarm maintenance. Smoke alarm batteries should be changed whenever they start to beep. The classic time to change the battery is at daylight savings time. Changing once or twice a year really is cheap insurance against having the alarm go dead. Test the alarm once a month. If it doesn't sound the alarm, replace it that day. Even if all the alarms are interconnected, test each one to make certain they work.

When should you replace your alarm? Follow the manufacturer recommendations. Most say every 7-10 years. The sensors break down making them less effective. As I mentioned earlier, some smoke alarms have a 10 year lithium ion battery. That's a perfect alarm. No batteries to buy, and you replace it as recommended when the lithium ion battery dies. Write the month and year you installed the alarm on the side with marker so you can read it easily from the ground. That way, it doesn't take any time to figure out how old it is while you're doing maintenance.



VENDOR NUMBERS

All of the correspondence you receive from Metro HRA should now include your vendor number. Please keep your vendor number handy and use it on ALL correspondence you send to Metro HRA to ensure we are providing you with the best possible service.

ENERGY STAR

Consider buying ENERGY STAR products next time you replace an appliance. It's good for you and good for the environment. Go to www.energystar.gov for more information.

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT FAIR HOUSING?

Check out this website:

<http://fairhousingmn.org/>

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