

# A Newsletter for Housing Owners

## METRO HRA

Housing & Redevelopment Authority

# VIEWS



## GO GREEN WITH ASSISTANCE CHECK

For your convenience, we are offering a new 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](http://www.metrohra.org).

## INSPECTIONS

Metro HRA encourages all landlords to prepare for the HQS inspection as soon as you receive notice of your inspection date. Checking for potential fail items and making repairs ahead of time greatly increases the possibility of a passed inspection on the first visit. If a unit has an excessive number of fail items, more than 15, or is in very poor condition the inspector may cancel the inspection and state that the unit be fixed up and a new full inspection scheduled.

If the unit does fail or is canceled due to excessive repairs needed, complete the repairs and call or e-mail for a re-inspection right away to avoid late or prorated rent. We will NO LONGER be automatically rescheduling re-inspections, you must contact us. We can be reached at [hraispections@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:hraispections@metc.state.mn.us) or (651) 602-1626. DO NOT call the inspector directly he is not able to reschedule the inspection for you.

Rental payments begin the later of; the lease date, the date the tenant moves in or the date the unit passes inspection. HUD regulations prohibit rent payments on any unit that has not passed the initial and/or annual inspection or any unit that is not currently occupied by the assisted family. For this reason we advise landlords and tenants to not cancel an inspection unless the tenant has moved out or has turned in paperwork for a new unit.

Please be sure the repairs are completed BEFORE you call for a re-inspection. Thank you for being proactive.

SUMMER 2015

### YOUR TENANT- YOUR LEASE

Please remember you are the landlord and you have the lease with your tenant. The Housing Authority provides assistance with the rent but we legally cannot enforce your lease for you. If your tenant has not paid their rent or has other lease violations we would encourage you to treat them the same as you would any one of your tenants. If that means giving notice to vacate within the terms of your lease or legally evict them, we ask that you provide the Metro HRA with a copy of any notices or a description of lease violations.

### 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](mailto:mary.d-hra@metc.state.mn.us).

### COMING SOON

HUD regulations have changed regarding annual inspections. Some units may qualify for a biennial inspection instead of an annual one. The unit must meet certain criteria set by HUD and the local Housing Authority, in this case Metro HRA. If you have a property with several units and one of them qualifies for a biennial inspection it does not mean that all of the units will qualify. There are some restrictions. We hope to implement this in fall 2015.



**It's unavoidable.** It sweeps across the landscape like an advancing army with no opposing forces. We often welcome it with open arms after a long hot summer, as if we've been sprinkled with amnesia dust from past seasons. Its relentless power overtakes and marches further south until the only thing we can rely on is that great ball of fire in the sky. Shudder with fear, if you're not prepared. Winter is coming!

All that aside, it's not like we live in 1837 and we have to stock food, cut wood, and thrash hay for the nine months of winter ahead. Yet, there are things every property owner should do so the destruction of Old Man Winter or Jack Frost, whichever you prefer, doesn't reach in your pocket book and leave you out in the cold. I could probably write a book on the topic of winterization, but for this, I'll pull out my five or six most used tools from past experience on getting your property ready for the long cold winter.



**Furnace.** We take these for granted as they sit quietly in the bowels of the property. Regardless if it's hot water, or forced air, they need attention. In my days as an on-call maintenance technician, there were two items that I did more. First, change the filter. Obvious, I know, but it's by far the number one failure of all forced air furnaces. Clogged filters don't let air get through, then it heats up, the cut out switch shuts the furnace down, and it short cycles until the switch stops altogether. Residents complain it's cold in the house because no air is moving, flames roll out of the burner chamber triggering roll out switches, and I could go on. A dirty filter is like an avalanche. It snowballs to all sorts of problems. Second, the flame sensor. Every flame sensor gets dirty. It doesn't matter how many times you change the filter, they get dirty. And are these little sticks sensitive! Detecting millivolts doesn't leave much room for error, err, dirt to make them stop working. You're out of luck if the sensor doesn't find flame. It's usually just one screw, right in the path of the burners. Takes five minutes to pull out, sand down with some fine sandpaper or steel wool, and put back in. If you haven't cleaned it, or have had it cleaned in a couple years, do it now, your warm blankets on your cozy bed will thank you when you're not getting up in the middle of the night.

**Hose bibs.** I can't count how many times I've walked up to a house in the middle of January, and saw a hose attached to a house, and the hose bib is still on! Then, the hose breaks, or the bib freezes, and you have a frozen water fall out the side of the building. That's not even the worst of it. When it warms up, the busted pipe thaws, and now there's a flood in the basement with thousands in damages. All from a hose bib not properly winterized. Disconnect the hoses, turn the bib off, and if there is a shut off inside, shut it off and open the little drain port if so equipped. Old houses don't have frost free bibs, so you'll find these shut offs inside the heated space somewhere, usually nearby the outside bib. Don't let frost free fool you either. An attached hose to a frost free bib renders the "free" useless.

**Smoke and CO alarms.** I'll always bring this up. When it annoys you, I'll still bring it up. Make sure these little devices work. The house is now closed up, people spend more time inside, and accidents are more likely to occur. One of the highest fire seasons is during the holidays. Make sure all the smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms work. Are there enough of them to protect everyone living inside the unit? Holiday cheer shouldn't be cut short because of senseless and avoidable deaths from a lack of alarms or ones that don't work.

**Gutters.** Fall is fallen, and who doesn't like jumping in the leaves? It can even be fun to rake for five minutes until that gust of wind drives your neighbor's maple leaves in your yard. Don't forget the gutters? You look puzzled. Think about it. Clean the gutters out now because you won't be able to when snow melt freezes on the eaves because they couldn't drain and now you either have ice dams or water in the basement because it just cascades over the top. Come spring, you'll be too busy enjoying a walk around the lake to think about cleaning the gutters, and that first big rain storm will send all the water to the lower levels creating Basement Lake just because a few leaves were stuck in the gutters and downspouts.

**Blinds.** Often in the inspection process, I hear and see an increase in the number of complaints about what many residents refer to as mold around their windows. Most times a moisture problem is all it is. This leads to rotting sills, mushy drywall, failed inspections, etc... As inspectors, we try and educate residents on how this happens among other things, and the science behind condensation and air movement. Really not too complicated or scientific, but nonetheless, a surprising number of people don't realize the importance of getting a little air behind the curtains. When you're at your property getting things ready for winter, spend a little time educating your residents on opening the blinds for a while daily during the winter months to let them dry out. While you're at it, take a look at the windows to see what could be improved on energy conservation.

**Rodents.** With summer past us, fall in full swing, and winter on the doorstep with the U-Haul backed up to move in, it's high time to evict the residents that don't pay rent, and keep them from coming back. Spiders and ants are pretty much gone, but mice are making their way in. Take a stroll around the property and arm yourself with the rodent blocking spray foam, some steel wool, or even a visit from your favorite pest control company to help you with the project. Rodents cause millions of dollars in damages each year, not to mention the gross factor when it comes time for the online review. People just don't like to live with anything that isn't invited, and they're not afraid to voice it.

There you have it. Not necessarily in order of importance, but certainly some of the top issues all landlords face every year around this time. Hopefully you'll be able to take something from this list and in turn will help your investment survive the winter.

## 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. The Metropolitan Council will be launching Community Choice the fall of 2015.

### What services are offered by Community Choice?

Mobility counselor's work with motivated families to establish action plans and self sufficiency goals, provide housing search assistance, connect to needed supportive services and assist with integration into their new community. Families will work with Community Choice counselors for a period of two years; ensuring that families have the support of the HRA to make their move successful.

### 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.

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 and families who are a new or current HCV participant. In addition, families must be committed to self-sufficiency, have minor child(ren) in the household, and have the desire to move to an area of opportunity.

### 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](mailto:corina.s-hra@metc.state.mn.us) or 651-602-1869  
**Terry H.** [terry.h-hra@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:terry.h-hra@metc.state.mn.us) or 651-602-1952



## 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](http://www.energystar.gov) for more information.

## LANDLORD APPRECIATION:

Thank You for your participation in the Metro HRA rent assistance program. The Metro HRA assists over 6000 households each month, 45% of those households are elderly and/or disabled. Metro HRA appreciates all of our landlords who are committed to providing decent, safe, and sanitary housing for their tenants. We encourage landlords to have a clear, complete lease and to consistently enforce that lease with all of their tenants. Landlords who visit their properties on a somewhat regular basis, we recommend at least monthly, have the most success in enforcing their lease, maintaining their properties and keeping good tenants.

Thank you for helping us make this program a continued success, we can't do it without you.

## DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT FAIR HOUSING?

Check out this website:  
<http://fairhousingmn.org/>





## **METRO HRA**

390 Robert Street North  
Saint Paul, MN 55101-1805

### **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:

- **November 10, 2015, 2:00 p.m.**
- **February 9, 2016, 10:00 a.m.**
- **May 10, 2016, 2:00 p.m.**

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

### **DIRECT DEPOSIT**

Metro HRA encourages all landlords to enroll in the direct deposit system as a convenient Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) option. By offering direct deposit, Metro HRA provides you the option to have your monthly HAP directly deposited into your checking or savings account.

Direct Deposit is a convenient way to receive your payments and eliminates the delays of mailing and the possibility of lost checks.

To request an enrollment form for direct deposit, or to make a change if you already have direct deposit, please contact Lona P. at [Lona.P-hra@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:Lona.P-hra@metc.state.mn.us) or **651-602-1565**

### **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](http://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.