

A Newsletter for Housing Owners

METRO HRA

Housing & Redevelopment Authority

VIEWS



The Toolbox

By Joseph K. Metro HRA Inspector

FALL 2014

Fire!!! It is a greatly feared element that jolts us from sleep, and makes us run for the door. I have a few tools that I'd like to share with you from my toolbox that can help you avoid it, and prevent the spread.

Keep it fresh. There's nothing like a little romance in a relationship to spice it up and keep it freshly charged. Your smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms are much the same way. You have to pay attention to them once in a while. I've walked into houses with a smoke alarm beeping the low battery signal and have asked resi-



dents why they don't replace the batteries? Many times I've received the standard answer that they don't hear anything. Here's a thought. Replace the alarm with a 10 year lithium battery. They cost twice as much, but over the life of the alarm, you'd make it up in batteries alone. The fire department wants smoke alarms replaced every ten years anyways, so it makes perfect sense. Put a note ten years from now in your Outlook calendar to replace it, and you're golden. Carbon monoxide detectors need replacing every five years. Marking the backs of them in permanent marker with the install date will help you remember when to replace them.

Keep it clean. If a furnace could nag, it would be about its filter. To prevent a fire, change the furnace filter. More repairs are caused by dirty ones. If you don't trust the resident to change them, get some that will last three or four months, and don't forget to change it in the summer for the A/C. A dirty filter makes your furnace run hot, and then components burn out inside prematurely, and can result in failure or fire. Don't take the filter out and flip it around thinking you can double the life out of it. Yes, I've seen it... after the fire department put the furnace out. It was like the Mill City fire explosion. If you have a boiler, make sure the fins that run along the wall are free from dirt and debris. Imagine how much heat is lost from dirty registers.

Keep it charged. Don't bring a knife to a gun fight, and don't reach for the empty fire extinguisher to put out the fire. Never, ever throw water on a grease fire! In other words, know your enemy, how to fight him, and have all your weapons ready. I wonder how many homes don't

SMOKE ALARMS and CO DETECTORS

When you set your clocks back this month remember to check your smoke and CO alarms. If they are 10 years old or older they need to be replaced. They may still beep when tested but they will not work as well or at all when really needed.

COMING SOON:

Metro HRA will be changing to a new software called HAPPY effective December 1, 2014, watch for new ways to access your information and other changes. You can follow this information on our website at **Metrohra.org**.

Inspections will be going paperless with this change effective December 1, 2014. What this means to you as a landlord:

- You will be able to read our writing
- We will not have a carbon copy to leave you at the inspection.
- BUT if we have your e-mail address we can send you a copy of the inspection right away.

These changes are very exciting and we are HAPPY to be moving into the paperless age. We ask for your patience during this time of transition.

DID YOU KNOW??

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

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have a fire extinguisher, and then how many have one, but it's expired. Besides alarms, I would have to say a working fire extinguisher would be the next most important thing to have in a property. There are many kinds and types, but the most recommended one takes care of the three most common types of fires; combustibles, liquids, and electrical. If you're wondering about grease, pick up a couple of fire stop pucks that go off automatically when they sense fire. Attached to the underside of a hood vent with magnets, its cheap insurance considering the staggering amount of cooking fires that occur each year.

Keep it clear. Everyone needs a little fiber in their diet. It might be a dirty subject, but let's face it, keep the pipes clear, and everything flows out quite nicely. You might be thinking how on earth do the pipes catch fire? Dryer vent pipes do. That little tumbling drum in the basement that no one pays any attention to causes over 10,000 fires a year in North America alone. Start with the proper vent. What were they thinking when the cheap accordion flexible pipe was invented. Rip that out, no matter how hard it is to replace. All those ridges create pockets for wet lint to catch on, build up, and cycle over and over until air will simply not pass through, and generate heat, then fire. The safest, and best material, and in most communities, the only code compliant, is the rigid ducting. Take the time to do it right, and keep the vent short. Don't use screws, they are also lint catchers, and don't use duct tape. Use foil tape or clamps. Lint builds up, creates a smaller vent hole, which creates heat, which requires the dryer to run longer to dry the clothes, which makes more lint and heat, and you get the picture. Fire. Lastly, give the vent a colonoscopy once a year. Either take it apart and clean it, or bring in a professional company to clean it in place.



Keep it informed. When there is a fire, ignorance is not bliss. Reaction time is critical, and the only way to react effectively is to know how to react. Firemen train train train. Why don't we? Showing a resident how to use a fire extinguisher, or get out of the window with the fire escape ladder, before the fire, could save lives. Educate your tenants. Do you know what you would do in case of fire at a property you own? If not, chances are the person living there doesn't either.

Keep it code. The windows have to be a certain size, the ceiling has to be a certain height, and you can't store certain things in certain areas. The inspector is generally trying to keep us safe, and the men and women that enter the burning building safe as well. Codes are a mixed bag of tricks that favor both the resident and the fireman. Keeping the house not cluttered is for a fireman so they don't stumble and fall when the room is full of smoke. A seven foot ceiling keeps the smoke above the average person so they have more time to get out. Egress window dimensions are in favor of a fireman with a full set of gear on, not necessarily for me in my pajamas. Rather than fight it, make the changes, keep it up to code, and you'll have nothing to worry about if that one time there is a disaster. Don't say it will never happen to me.

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 the unit does fail, complete the repairs and call or e-mail for a re-inspection right away to avoid late or prorated rent. We can be reached at hrainspect@metc.state.mn.us or (651) 602-1626.

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.

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

Thank you for being proactive

REQUEST FOR TENANCY APPROVAL (RTA) REVIEW:

We understand that we are requesting a lot of information on the RTA. Please be patient and complete it carefully, legibly and completely. This will enable us to begin the required paperwork for a new tenant without a delay. Please clearly print your name and address so we can be sure that our letters get to you.

NEW POLICY

Metro HRA will only do move-in inspection on vacant units or units that are occupied by the subsidized family. We will no longer perform a move-in inspection on a unit that is still occupied by the previous tenant. We have provided a place on the RTA for the landlord to indicate if the unit is vacant or occupied. There is also a place to indicate the date the unit is available for inspection.

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.

RENEWING THE TENANT'S LEASE?

Approximately 4 months, (120 days) prior to a tenant's lease renewal, Metro HRA sends a letter to the landlords of all current tenants asking if they intend to renew the lease. We require these back at least 60 days prior to the lease renewal to provide us with at least a 60 day notice of possible rent increase or non-renewal. Please help us by completing these and returning them on time.

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.

GO GREEN - E-MAIL

Do we have your e-mail address? With the ever increasing cost of postage we would like to do as much of our day to day communication as possible by e-mail. Please contact Lona P. to provide your current e-mail address. She can be reached at: lona.p-hra@metc.state.mn.us or **651-602-1565**.

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.

VISIT US ON LINE

The Metropolitan Council has launched an updated website, please visit it at www.metrohra.org. We will be adding information for Landlords about Metro HRA programs. We will also be adding forms and other helpful links for you to utilize. We are requesting that you give us your feedback about what you would like to see on our website as a landlord. Please email your suggestions to: mary.d-hra@metc.state.mn.us.



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 18, 2014, 2:00 p.m.**
- **February 10, 2015, 10:00 a.m.**
- **May 12, 2015, 2:00 p.m.**

For more information or to register contact Mary D at 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 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.housing-link.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.