



OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

January 2017

Housing

Complaints:

Housing officials will deal with a variety of complaints throughout the year that involve off-campus properties, but these aren't always fire safety issues. Some of the complaints relate to the function or operation of the dwelling, or contribute to the quality of life for the residents and the neighborhood. The reporting parties may be a tenant, parent, landlord or a neighbor. Examples that generate these calls include the proper operation of the appliances; kitchen, heating or laundry. It could be related to moisture problems, mold or water leaks. Exterior areas are also common for complaints; including peeling paint, handrails/guardrails or broken windows.

One of the most common calls often deals with

housekeeping, or maintaining the interior of a property clean and sanitary. Now, everyone has a different idea of what 'clean' is. Landlords may call an inspector for assistance in maintaining a property after they've exhausted all of their legal options. Parents may call upon move-in, in shock at the condition of a property that their son or daughter signed a lease for. It may be clean, or reasonably clean - just not to their standard or expectations.

Some of the calls may be a violation, in accordance with the adopted code. While others are merely a difference of opinion, or a legal matter between parties on the lease.

An inspector needs to know their legal obligation when investigating a complaint of this type. If the condition is a violation, or hazard as defined in the code, then the code will also provide the steps that need to be taken in order to gain compliance. The

first action may be to issue notice to the party responsible for the issue, and provide a reasonable time to make the repair. Reasonable will depend on the repair that is required, and may be anywhere from immediate, to a few weeks or longer. If that fails, the next step may include legal action or a fine.

One of the most common calls an inspector may have is that the condition reported is not a violation of the code, but a civil matter between the parties on the lease. These parties must try to reach an agreement, or seek legal counsel for help. Many times the municipal inspector will not be trained in these matters, or does not have authority to take action. So, the inspector acts as more of a mediator than an enforcer.

These complaints may often times seem trivial, or a waste of one's time. But, many times compliance isn't that



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difficult to achieve. Providing good customer service to everyone involved is key, and don't act like someone is wasting your time. These interactions provide the inspector an opportunity to test smoke/CO alarms or discuss any other safety issue that may be observed.

Taking time to investigate these complaints may help to prevent further calls, improve the property for the tenants, and help to improve the overall condition of the neighborhood. More importantly, it provides an inspector with a feeling of satisfaction knowing that you made a difference for the customer.

Tim

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In this position he manages the Existing Structures Division that administers the fire and property maintenance code in all existing commercial and residential rental properties, and coordinates the life safety education for the community including off-campus and Greek housing.

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