



# BLOOMINGTON RENTAL HOUSING COLLABORATIVE NEWSLETTER FOR RENTAL PROPERTY OWNERS AND MANAGERS

September 2011

Bloomington HRA

Phone  
952-563-8937

TTY  
952-563-8740

Fax  
952-563-4977

## THE NEXT MEETING IS IN OCTOBER!

All rental housing owners, managers, leasing agents, maintenance staff and other interested parties are encouraged to attend this free Bloomington Rental Collaborative Meeting. Please join us – this will be your first opportunity to meet Officer Thomas McCullough with the Community Response and Enforcement Unit. The meeting will take place **Monday, October 24, 2011, at 10 a.m. at Bloomington Civic Plaza, 1800 W. Old Shakopee Road, in the Haeg Room** on the second floor. If you have suggestions for newsletter or meeting topics, contact Kathy Warren at 952-563-8942; TTY 952-563-8740 or e-mail [kwarren@ci.bloomington.mn.us](mailto:kwarren@ci.bloomington.mn.us).

## TRAIN STAFF TO LOOK FOR WARNING SIGNS OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY INSIDE RESIDENTS' APARTMENTS

No matter how carefully you screen apartment applicants, you may end up with a resident who uses his apartment for criminal activities. And even if you do not know about the resident's criminal activity, you may be liable to other residents who are affected by it and your community may earn a bad reputation. To help prevent this from happening, train your staff to look for obvious warning signs and report them to you immediately. Below is a list of warning signs of criminal activity in residents' apartments.

### LOOK FOR WARNING SIGNS OF DRUG SALES AND MANUFACTURE

Because staff members in maintenance or management are often in apartments for maintenance calls or other complaints, they are the best people to detect potential criminal activities inside those apartments. Tell staff to keep an eye open for signs of criminal activity in what is legally termed "plain view" or, in other words, things that can be seen without having to conduct an actual search for them. For example, a scale and bags filled with a white powdery substance on the kitchen counter would be considered in plain view. Staff should not open drawers or closets or look under beds or anywhere else where a resident would have a reasonable expectation of privacy. This can be viewed as an invasion of privacy and can open you up to liability. The following are some warning signs of drug sales and manufacture.

- **Blacked out windows.** Residents committing crimes in their apartments often use materials such as tin foil or black trash bags to black out the windows so they cannot be seen from the outside.
- **Grow lights.** If the apartment is filled with special high intensity or grow lights, this is a sign the resident may be growing marijuana.
- **Strong odors.** Almost all drug manufacturing produces an odor, and the odor is often very foul and can be dangerous. The growth of marijuana plants inside an apartment can give off a strong, sweet smell. The heating of crack cocaine produces a smell similar to burning electrical wires. Also, methamphetamine creates a strong pungent odor like ammonia or urine.
- **Large amounts of chemicals.** If a resident has large amounts of chemicals such as antifreeze, camp stove fuel, gasoline or ether in the apartment, this can be a red flag that drugs are being produced.
- **Baby food jars with milky liquids inside.** This is an example of how a common household item can be used in connection with the production of drugs. People who produce crack cocaine often use baby food jars to cook and then store the chalky liquid by product of the drug.
- **Weight scales and packaging materials.** A common sign of drug selling is a weight scale and large amounts of small plastic bags for packaging drugs.
- **Plumbing alterations.** Sometimes someone setting up a drug manufacturing operation will remove the fixtures in a sink or even remove a toilet to use the water pipes and drains. Exposed pipes with nothing attached are a good sign that something illegal is occurring in that apartment.
- **Dead bolt locks or hasps with paddle locks on doors.** If a drug operation is being run out of a bedroom, the resident will often install a dead bolt lock or hasp on the door. When asked permission to inspect the room, the resident will often make excuses such as "This is my son's room and I don't have a key for it." Behavior such as this, coupled with a locked room, should raise suspicions.

### LOOK OUT FOR SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR

While questionable items inside a resident's apartment can be evidence of criminal activity, there may be perfectly legal explanations. So it's also important for your staff to take note of the behavior of questionable residents. The back page describes some behaviors common to people engaging in criminal activity.

• The City of Bloomington does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its services, programs, or activities.

Upon request, accommodation will be provided to allow individuals with disabilities to participate in all City of Bloomington services, programs, and activities.

• Upon request, this information can be available in Braille, large print, audio tape and/or electronic format.



EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

- **People not on lease live in apartment.** When setting up a drug, prostitution or other criminal business, a “legitimate” person will often fill out the rental application and sign the lease. Then they fill the unit with people engaging in illegal activities. That is why it is so important to know who is living in your apartments and immediately investigate when people not on the lease appear to be living there.
- **Residents pay rent in advance in cash.** Criminals usually do not like leaving a paper trail, so they often pay with cash. They may also offer to pay several months in advance. They may do this because their credit history is bad or non-existent, or because they are hoping to not be bothered during the period of paid-up rent. They may also think if they skip out on the lease, they will not be pursued.
- **Residents refuse maintenance and pesticide services.** Residents involved in criminal activity will often refuse these services because they do not want anyone going inside of their apartment to see what is taking place in their unit.
- **Residents have a steady stream of visitors.** Residents engaged in drug sales or prostitution will often have a steady stream of visitors who stay only short periods of time. This may increase during the mid afternoon and evening hours.
- **Residents have high electric bills.** If a resident is manufacturing or growing drugs, their electrical bills will be much higher than those in similar units during the same time periods.
- **Residents get large shipments of chemicals.** Residents manufacturing drugs often get their chemicals delivered to them by UPS or some other courier service. So your staff should watch for frequent deliveries of large packages of chemicals.
- **Residents move in with little furniture.** This can indicate intent to set up a drug lab or drug selling business out of an apartment. It can also indicate the resident intends to stay only a short time.

**WHAT TO DO IF SUSPICIONS ARE RAISED**

Apartment owners and managers have two objectives once they find out that a resident is engaging in criminal activity. The first is to safeguard the community by evicting the resident. The second is to notify the police so that the resident can be caught. The best way to accomplish this is to train the staff to report any suspicions to management immediately. Then management can review the information and decide what steps need to be taken. If management confirms that criminal activity is likely taking place, it should notify the police so they can investigate the situation immediately. Then, if reliable evidence of criminal activity has been found, management would begin eviction proceedings against the resident.

Most standard apartment leases let management evict residents whose activities interfere with the safety or “quiet enjoyment” of their neighbors. But to be on the safe side, many communities are having residents sign a crime-free lease addendum that specifically states that criminal conduct is grounds for eviction.

Portions reprinted from the *Assisted Housing Management Insider*.

\*\*\*\*\*

**COUNTY OFFERS MULTI-FAMILY RECYCLING RESOURCES**

**H**ennepin County now offers resources to improve recycling at apartment building. The County has the following free resources for rental property managers and owners to use to increase recycling participation and decrease contamination at their multi-family buildings:

- Container stickers (for both single-sort and two-sort recycling systems).
- Informational door hangers and posters.
- Master Recycler/Composters are available to do outreach, resident education presentations and door knocking. (Master Recycler/Composters are Hennepin County’s new pool of trained volunteers. The program is similar to the Master Gardener Program.)
- Technical assistance and on-site assessments.

Contact Carolyn Collopy at [carolyn.collopy@co.hennepin.mn.us](mailto:carolyn.collopy@co.hennepin.mn.us) or 612-596-0993 if you would like any materials or would like assistance with recycling at your rental property.

\*\*\*\*\*

**FIND US ON THE WEB!**

**F**or more local information about housing, check out our website at [www.ci.bloomington.mn.us](http://www.ci.bloomington.mn.us), then search by keywords: Rental Housing Collaborative. Updated Bloomington Rental Collaborative meeting times and topics can always be found here.