

Your landlord is probably right

Editor's note:

This question and answer column is being produced by a small staff of tenants working out of Off-Campus Housing at the University because a great deal of misinformation and a lack of knowledge exists in the area of tenant and housing problems.

The information in this column is not intended to be legal advice and should not be relied on in answering any specific legal question or problem. A slight modification of the facts may result in a radically different answer. To resolve a specific problem there is no substitute for individual legal advice, contact an attorney or Legal Aid.

Dear Housing Problem:

Our sink drain frequently plugs up. I have asked the landlord to repair the sink, but he says he doesn't have to, that since there is nothing in the lease he is not required to repair my dwelling. Is he right?

Love, Baffled

Dear Baffled:

Your landlord probably is right. Since the laws vary from city to city and county to county, you should check with an attorney or Legal Aid to be sure.

In most parts of Oregon Landlords are not required to repair or maintain rental units.

Building and housing codes do exist in Lane County, Portland, Salem, Eugene, and some other

cities and counties. You should check with your local city or county building or housing department to see if there is a building or housing code in your area and if your problem is covered by the code. Building codes generally regulate the construction of new buildings, while housing codes govern repair and maintenance of existing structures.



If there is a code violation, the inspector may require your landlord to make the necessary repairs. If there are serious violations the building may be condemned, forcing you to move. If the landlord becomes angry with you for turning him in, you may find yourself the victim of retaliatory eviction. In Oregon a

landlord can force you out of a unit by refusing to renew a lease, or if you are not on a lease, by giving thirty days written notice, for any reason, for no reason, or in retaliation for your having reported him. Since most cities can not afford a large staff of housing inspectors and must rely on tenant complaints, the effect of retaliatory evictions, or its threat, is to prevent enforcement of building and housing codes which are primarily designed to protect health and safety.

In the absence of a strong housing code there is little you can do to force the landlord to make necessary repairs. Some leases and rental agreements do require a landlord to maintain your unit, but since most lease and rental agreements are drafted by a landlord's attorney, such provisions are rare.

The Oregon legislature is now considering legislation that would require rental housing to be maintained in fit and habitable condition. The bill, Senate Bill 159, specifically defines the landlord's obligations and should provide some protection for tenants in situations where the landlord is unwilling or reluctant to make necessary repairs. Existing law has been little changed since Sixteenth Century England when most tenants were farmers, buildings were of simple construction, there was no plumbing, no electricity, and central heating was unknown.

Senate Bill 159 would also make it more difficult for tenants to be evicted simply because they complain to a public agency, or to the landlord, about a health or safety violation.

If you have a question about a housing problem, write to Housing Problems, 319 Erb Memorial Union, Eugene, Oregon 97403. General or common inquiries will be answered through this column.

Matthews elected

Esther Matthews, professor of education at the University, has been named president-elect of the National Vocational Guidance Association for 1973-74.

She previously served as secretary of the group and as chairer of the Association's Commission on the Occupational Status of Women. The group is a branch of the American Personnel and Guidance Association.

Matthews has been at the University since 1966.

She is spending the current academic year on sabbatical leave, visiting and lecturing at various research centers in the United States and Europe.

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Sea Urchin hoards controlled with otters and quicklime

About twenty people showed up Monday night to hear a talk billed as "Fighting the Sea Urchin Hoards."

The talk was given by Wheeler North, a professor of environmental science at the California Institute of Technology, who has been visiting the University for the past few days.

"Fighting the Sea Urchin Hoards" is a pretty dramatic title," said North. "People expect me to stand up soaking wet with spines sticking all over me."

North said that sea otters, once plentiful along the coast of Southern California, were nearly wiped out by fur hunters in the last century. The otters, which eat sea urchins, had held the population in check. Once the otters were gone the urchins proliferated, and destroyed many coastal kelp beds.

"These beds," said North, "are the richest communities of our coastlines."

Kelp, which is a valuable source of certain chemicals, can be harvested by man on a controlled basis.

North said he and his colleagues had ex-

perimented with various methods of cutting back the urchin population. "Possibly the most effective technique is to just take a hammer and hit them. We call this method 'bopping'."

But this method is good for only small scale control. Another technique developed by North is the use of quicklime. Large quantities of the chemical are dumped over the sides of special ships. Harmless to most marine life, quicklime is fatal to urchins. In areas where this technique was tested, said North, kelp beds returned rapidly.

North admitted that these methods may only deal with symptoms, not the real problem, which is the loss of the sea otter population. The otters, now protected by law, are slowly making a comeback. The herd is presently estimated at about a thousand.

Urchins are considered a delicacy in the Orient and by certain cultures in the Mediterranean. "I've tried them," said North. "The roe is delicious, especially if you take along a bottle of chilled white wine. But I'd advise wearing a wetsuit when you're opening them."



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