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Photo by Jeff Paslay

Student-owned co-op housing like Janet Smith provides a way for students to take greater control over their housing situations.

Put your rights in writing when renting

By Jen Ellison
Emerald Contributor

You can avoid the most common problems with your landlord. Amy Clements of OSPIRG says "Put it in writing!"

When you first move in, make a very detailed list of everything that is and isn't in the apartment and what condition it is in down to the number of holes in the walls. A detailed list is available at the Rental Information Office in the basement of the EMU. Copy this list and date it within 10 days of the day you signed your lease. That way you will save trouble when you are trying to get your deposit back.

If there is a problem, write the landlord about it, date the letter and keep a copy. If the problem is an essential need such as heat, water, light or security, the problem must be fixed within seven days.

If the problem is not fixed in seven days, write again and remind the landlord of the problem. Give him or her a reasonable deadline to fix the problem. Also state the action you will take if it is not done by that deadline.

If the problem still exists on the deadline, you can take action. Write a letter stating what action you will take. You have three options of action to take:

• **Fix or quit.** State that you

will break your lease without penalty because the problem has not been solved.

• **Withhold rent.** Clements suggests you make a separate bank account and pay rent into it as you would your regular rent. If the landlord takes you to court for withholding rent, you have bank documents saying the money is being set aside for when the landlord does the repairs. Once the problem has been fixed, you must pay the landlord all the back rent.

• **Repair and deduct.** Repair the problem yourself and deduct the cost from your rent up to \$200. Remember to save the re-

ceipts and make a copy when submitting the reduced rent.

The OSPIRG Renter's Hotline is 346-HELP. Anyone, student or not, is free to call if there is a problem with a landlord or a tenant. OSPIRG also sells the *Renter's Handbook*, a breakdown of the Landlord-Tenant Act. It costs \$3 for students and \$4 for anyone else. Ruby Brenne, Renter's Hotline consumer affairs coordinator, highly recommends the handbook.

The Lane County Consumer Affairs Coordinator is no longer available, but complaints can be made to the Better Business Bureau at 1-800-488-4166.

HOTLINE

Continued from Page 2B

is to keep the dwelling habitable. Habitable is defined as: electricity safely hooked up and in working order, hot and cold running water, adequate plumbing, safe dwelling free of hazard such as a broken stair, weatherproofing, safe from fire hazard, adequate garbage receptacles and working locks on doors and windows.

Landlords can ask for a deposit for the repair of possible damages the tenant may cause. After tenants move out, some landlords charge an exceptional amount of money for things that weren't damaged by the tenant.

"I have a letter here from a girl who was charged \$1 for every light bulb that

was missing," Brenne said. "That's outrageous."

Teressa put \$25 down on an apartment in June that the landlord said he'd save for her for September. By September the apartment complex had been sold and new owners had no record of her payment. However, they had an open apartment and gave it to her, but the new owners made her pay a new deposit. Teressa lost the apartment she'd ultimately paid for as well as a deposit.

In Teressa's case, Brenne advised it would be cheaper to forget the \$25 than to press charges and pay court fees.

Students are the group that has the most trouble with landlords, Brenne said. Students don't realize the law and some don't think they can do any-

The largest problems for landlords are parties, noise and general lack of housekeeping skills.

thing. Some landlords know this and take advantage of students, she said.

Tenants aren't the only victims. Sometimes landlords are taken advantage of by tenants.

The largest problems for landlords are parties, noise and general lack of housekeeping skills, said Larry Sweek of Income Property Management. Sweek tries to weed out possible trouble causers through a screening process that cov-

ers a potential tenant's past credit and rental history.

"If a person has a bad rental history, he is not going to rent from us," Sweek said.

Barry Blanton of Jennings Property Management said 80 percent of the problems come from 20 percent of his renters. Blanton tries to be fair with renters and give them a copy of the Landlord-Tenant Act in the beginning so they know exactly what their rights are.

Ron Burke of Pac West Management said his worst tenants are what he calls "hang arounds."

"They are college-age people who aren't going to school but want to be around the college crowd," Burke said. "They throw parties, are loud and have problems paying the rent."

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