

RENT

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for free if searching out a roommate or renting out a room."

Yet, it does cost \$15 a day for non-students and property managers to list through the computer system and bulletins. Wood said with the shortage of dormitory space and the demand from students, it is worth the money to list.

"I get students and parents in here all day looking," Wood said. "Parents are freaking out about students having to find living arrangements outside of the dorms where they can be safe. I try and help them find a nice place to rent."

When school starts and freshman students choose to move out of the dorms into sororities and fraternities or cooperative housing, the demand for renting off campus may slow down.

Wood said although there remains a shortage of available rentals, the easiest thing to do is to move in with another student looking for a roommate.

"It's frustrating for students in this demanding time when there isn't much available, and you can't be too choosy," she said.

When the never-ending search is finally over, and students do actually find the place of their dreams, the struggle with business just begins.

It's important to consider everything about a rental unit thoroughly, beginning with the landlord or manager. OSPIRG has a *Renter's Handbook* available to guide students through those tedious, but important, endeavors.

"I tell students that the most important thing to do when you first move into a new place is to fill out a checklist on the condition of the house in order to get a full return of deposit," Wood said.

The checklist should include, in writing, all damage, disrepair and dirt sighted before the renter



Students can look at the boards in the EMU basement for rental information.

Know rights when renting

Avoid the most common problems with landlords by putting the apartment's condition in writing.

After first moving in, make a detailed list of everything that is and isn't in the apartment and what condition it is in.

A detailed list is available at the Rental Information Office in Suite 5 EMU. Copy this list and date it within 10 days of signing the lease, thus saving trouble when trying to get the deposit back at the end of the lease.

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 within seven days, write again and remind the landlord of the problem. Give the landlord a reasonable deadline to fix the problem and state the action you will take if it is not done by that deadline.

If the problem still exists on the dead-

line, action can be taken. Write a letter stating what action will be taken. There are three options of action available to take:

- **Fix or quit.** State that the lease will be broken without penalty because the problem has not been solved.

- **Withhold rent.** An idea is to make a separate bank account and pay rent into it as you would 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 is fixed, you must pay all of the back rent.

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

moves into the residence. For example, note if the carpets have been cleaned, if the windows and appliances have been washed and are working, and if anything is broken. All aspects of the residence

should be in full working condition.

"The most common misunderstandings come from withheld deposits that could have been saved if the checklist was filled out," Wood said.

The Smart Tenant's Checklist, as well as a packet of information including maps and other renter's information, can be picked up in the Rental Information Office Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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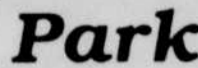
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