

Tenants should always be cautious

By John Davidson

As summer nears many of you will be leaving your current rentals and/or moving to new ones. These tips will help you to protect your legal and financial interests during the transition.

Always make written documentation of every significant occurrence between your and your landlord. (And always keep copies of all landlord-tenant documents!)

Ending a tenancy

1) **Giving notice.** If you have a term lease set to expire, then you probably don't need to worry about providing notice. But if you're on a month-to-month, you'll need to give 30-days notice. The notice should be written, and you should keep a copy of it.

The notice should state the exact termination date, which should be no less than 30 days from the day the notice is provided. The notice should use the word "termination." Termination is different than moving out.

Someone who moves out still owes rent. Someone who's terminated doesn't.

If the notice is mailed rather than hand delivered, then the relevant period needs to be at least 33 days, and the notice needs to mention that the extra three days were added and explain why.

Your notice should also include a forwarding address where the landlord can send your security deposit. It should indicate a date and time at which you would like to conduct a joint move-out inspection.

Ideally, hand deliver the notice and have the landlord or manager sign your copy acknowledging the day on which it was received and agreeing to the proposed termination date.

2) **Cleaning.** You should make some effort to clean the premises prior to vacating. If the rental agreement makes you responsible for the grounds, then you should also make some effort to mow the grass. After you've made these efforts, you should

take pictures. This is very important. When a landlord asserts cleaning and repair charges of \$1,000 and says you trashed the place, a picture can be worth its weight in gold.

Even if the landlord isn't holding a large security deposit, you should make some effort to clean. Otherwise the landlord may bill you for cleaning and repairs in excess of the deposit.

Aside from taking pictures that document your good-faith efforts, you should arrange a joint walk-through.

3) **Joint walk-through.** Bring two copies of an inventory sheet. You can get a sample inventory sheet from the Rental Information Office, located in EMU Suite 5.

One purpose of the walk-through is to get the landlord to confirm that specific things and areas are being returned in an acceptable condition. Another purpose is to have the landlord commit to an upper limit on the charges that he or she will deduct

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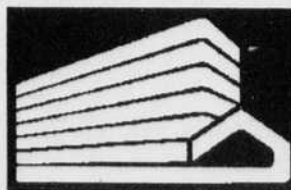
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