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# Pay rent, not a deposit: know your rental rights

■ Renters: protect yourself by putting agreements in writing and keeping copies

By Josh Ryneal  
Oregon Daily Emerald

When Camryn Kruger, a junior majoring in journalism, found herself with new landlords, she hoped that they would be as helpful as the previous ones.

That wasn't the case.

Kruger claimed that the new property management company took months to fix broken appliances, didn't return phone calls and even tried to raise the rent to get them to leave when Kruger's roommate complained.

"I don't understand how they can get away with this," she said.

Kruger's problems are not uncommon in Eugene, where a student-driven rental market can leave students unaware of their rights as tenants.

However, there are advocacy groups who are willing to help. The ASUO's Legal Services and OSPIRG both help students resolve disputes with landlords.

Nicole Miani, an attorney for ASUO Legal Services, said that when tenants move out of a property, they should document everything, including taking photographs of the house or apartment when they leave.

"Many landlords are pretty fair about this, but get a camera with a date stamp and take pictures of everything, including the floor,"

“Document any damage that is there when you move in so you won't get charged for it when you move out.”

**Nicole Miani**  
attorney  
ASUO Legal Services

she said.

Miani also said that tenants should document any oral agreements or complaints made to a landlord with a follow-up letter sent to the landlord confirming the agreement.

"You need to get something in writing to have evidence that you complained to them," she said.

Miani said that saving copies of

## Don't get taken advantage of

Students may not always be aware of their rights as tenants, but the OSPIRG Renter's Handbook provides a few important facts to prevent disputes with landlords.

**Take photographs** of the property when you move in and when you leave to document its condition and prevent misunderstandings.

**Write everything down**, and written agreements should include everything you have agreed on when you sign.

**A landlord has 31 days** after you move out to refund all or part of your deposit. If the landlord withholds any part of it, he or she must provide a written accounting of it.

**If something needs to be repaired**, notify the landlord by calling first, then following up with a written letter.

**If maintenance problems persist** and the landlord doesn't respond, you have the option to terminate a long-term agreement.

**When you move out**, be sure to contact the utility company to shut off service. Otherwise, you may be billed for the next tenant's services.

**A landlord cannot evict you** with a legal order from a court.

**You must leave the dwelling** in the same condition as when you moved in, minus "normal wear and tear." Broken windows, cigarette burns, dirty kitchens and bathrooms are not normal wear and tear.

Source: OSPIRG Renter's Handbook

all paperwork is extremely important in the event that disagreements occur over deposits or the condition of the property.

Refundable deposits, often paid to a landlord when a tenant moves into a property, can be withheld in part or in whole if landlords feel damage has been done to the property. However, there are certain rules governing this practice.

Miani said that landlords must provide a separate written account of money removed from the deposit and must state clearly what damages occurred and when.

"Document any damage that is there when you move in so you won't get charged for it when you move out," she said.

Legal Services doesn't usually represent students, as most landlord/tenant disputes are handled in small claims court, but it can advise them and help them draft letters.

"We don't usually represent people in court unless it's a case that will benefit all students," Mi-

ani said.

Erin Pursell, University chapter chair of Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group, said that students are often at a disadvantage when renting properties in Eugene because of a lack of housing codes and guidelines.

"Not having a housing code makes it difficult for renters and really puts landlords in a position of power," she said.

Pursell also said that because students are only in Eugene for a relatively short period, they aren't likely to learn rights as renters.

"We are seeing a lot of landlords trying to withhold deposits from students and take them for a ride," she said.

Issues with maintenance, sewage and garbage pickups are also big problems, and students should consult a lawyer if they feel that they are not receiving adequate responses from landlords.

Pursell urged students to visit the OSPIRG office at Suite 1 of the EMU and pick up a renter's rights handbook free of cost.

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