

RENTERS BEWARE

OSPIRG's renters rights project has documented hundreds of instances of dissatisfied tenants

By Sheldon Traver • Freelance Reporter

Walking up the steps of her Eugene apartment, senior Alyson Harding expected confrontation. She inched closer to the door and heard the footsteps of the beast she was about to confront: 60 pounds of matted black lab with growling, dirty yellow teeth snarling in the window.

"I end up crying and shaking every time I see it," Harding

said. "It's the spawn of Satan." Harding said her fear of various dogs that have shared her living space has forced her to move.

"I've had to move eight times in four years," she said.

To avoid situations such as this, renters should be wary of the housing situations they may be considering.

OSPIRG is working on a

renter's rights project at the University and Lane Community College. Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group Campus Organizer Kit Douglass said the group received 150 calls on its renter's rights hotline in April.

"We had one renter who had a toilet that would back up constantly and overflow into the kitchen and kitchen cabinets," Douglass said.

She said OSPIRG has seen houses with enough structural damage that the front door would not close, and added that it is important for renters

to be assertive when choosing a rental.

"The landlord — according to law — is supposed to provide a habitable place to live," Douglass said.

History major Jeromy French said he wishes he would have known more about his rights prior to moving into an old apartment.

"The roof was rotting, and there was a hole in the corner of my roof," French said.

To remedy the problem, he bought plastic to make a funnel for the torrent of water that would come when it rained.

"One evening I came home, and it had funneled into a corner and onto my roommate's bed downstairs," French said.

Fortunately, his roommate was able to find a dry spot to sleep until the mattress dried.

"The owners said they would get to it; however, it was never very high on their priority list," French said.

He lived with the problem for a year before finally moving out.

OSPIRG suggests students carefully examine their potential rental and write down any necessary repairs and when

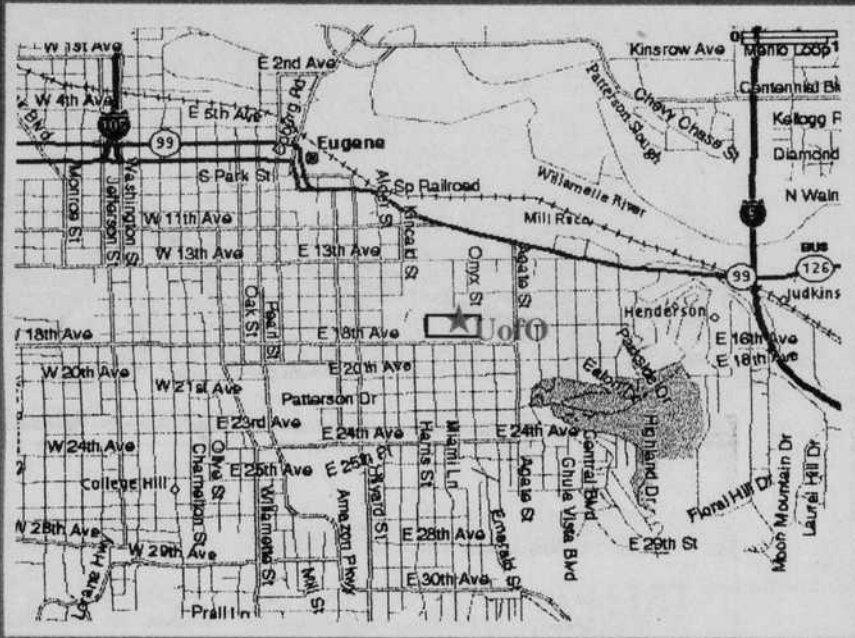
they will be fixed. For housing questions, call 346-HELP for free assistance.

Harding said she will meet her neighbors before signing any new agreements. For now, she said she hopes others will learn from her bad experiences.

"I live in a place where my neighbor's dog is evil and tries to kill me," Harding said. "It can't get much worse than this."

Sheldon Traver is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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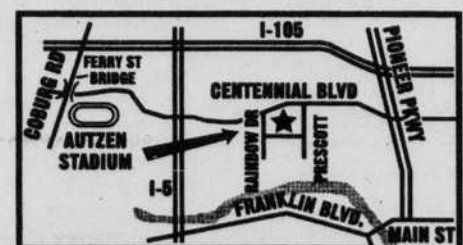
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