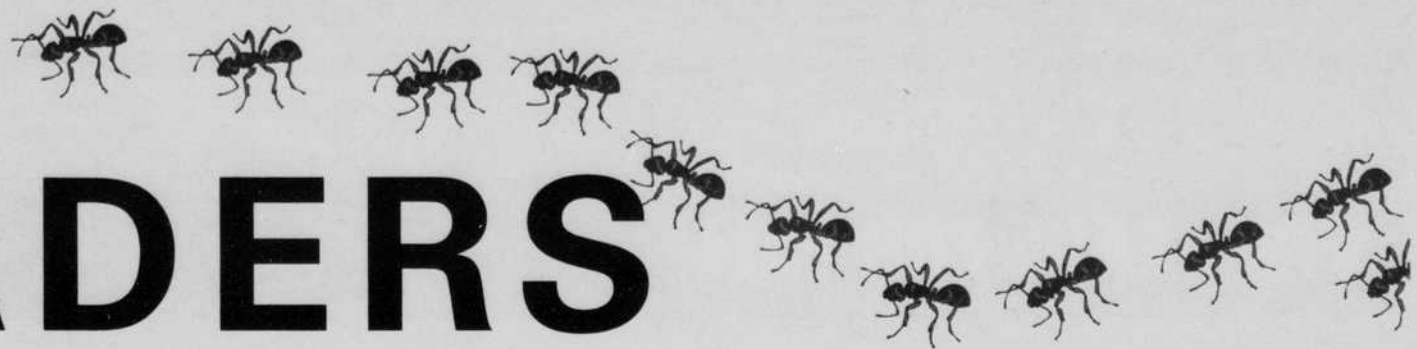


# Home INVADERS



Students should pay attention when looking at sites to ensure that pests and weathering won't cause later dilemmas for them

BY EMILY VANDEHEY  
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

Two years ago, an invasion occurred at a big brown house on Sandy Drive; senior Marcus Kent remembers it as if it were yesterday. He and his two roommates were surrounded. The enemies lie waiting in the woodwork — an army of ants had turned Kent's house into an anthill.

Every night, Kent and his roommates searched their rooms for pests. All it took to attract the ants was a glass of water left on a table or countertop.

"There would be so many ants that they would just fall straight off the side of the cupboard from trying to crawl over each other," Kent said.

Kent is one of many college students who have experienced less-than-perfect living conditions. To avoid a bad experience, it's important for students to arm themselves with the right questions about housing.

Before viewing rentals, students should research the property management companies and landlords they are

planning to rent from. Bryan Donahue, former lead chair of housing standards for OSPIRG, said finding a reputable rental company is vital.

"Most of the property management companies in Eugene do an excellent job," Donahue said. "But there are a few bad apples that possess a significant portion of the rental market."

Kent, who rented from a private landlord in 2002-03, agrees that the quality of a landlord is crucial. He recommends property management companies over private landlords. If students go through a private landlord, he suggests they obtain contact information from the previous tenant to ask about the quality of the landlord.

The next step is to stay on top of the application process. Terry Shockley, owner of Property Management Concepts, a Eugene rental company, recommends students complete the rental and co-signer applications in their entirety and turn in all forms at the same time. Some companies may require that the applications be turned in by all possible

roommates before being allowed to view any rentals.

When it's time to look, Donahue said to keep an eye open for potential property concerns with weatherization, dampness, electrical systems and leaky plumbing.

Donahue said he has heard of a wide range of problems from local tenants. The most common were complaints of mold and poor weatherization; the worst complaint was that poor structural integrity caused a second-floor toilet to fall through the ceiling.

Shockley said the person showing the rental may not always be knowledgeable about the property.

"A lot of the time, your property manager isn't necessarily going to know off-hand the history of the (rental) because they may be assigned that day to show the place," Shockley said.

If the property manager or landlord doesn't provide satisfactory answers, students should speak to the current tenant to gather more information, especially in regard to problems that appear over time. However, some property management companies have policies against potential tenants disturbing current ones, so students should check with them before knocking.

## RENTER QUESTIONS

Questions for the property manager or landlord:

1. Are the windows single- or double-paned? (Single-paned windows mean a colder rental.)
2. Where is the water heater, and how big is it? (A small water heater for a house of three or more people means cold showers.)
3. What type of heat? If a furnace, when was the last time it was maintained? (The most common is electric heat, but some have furnaces that require more maintenance and oil to run.)
4. Where are the telephone jacks and cable cord? (Make sure they are in decent and reasonable locations so you will be able to receive Internet, television and phone, if desired.)
5. Do all the locks on the doors and windows work?
6. Have there been any past problems of mold, dry rot or pests?
7. When was the rental last renovated? What updates did it receive?
8. Does the property management or landlord contact and pay for people to come fix broken appliances and pest problems?

Questions to ask current/past tenants:

1. Is the rental well-insulated? (Poor insulation leads to higher electric and water bills. Call EWEB and give the address to find the most expensive month of the year for that rental.)
2. Do the appliances work? (Tenants will be able to tell you whether the fridge drips or leaks, whether the chain on the toilet breaks, or whether the oven and burners turn on.)
3. Are there any mold, dry rot or pest problems? (Bathrooms are usually victims of mold, so take a close look for any gray/black areas.)

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