



## Inspections: Take the time now to save you \$ later

Inspection reports are often used to prove the condition of the property when a tenant moves in and when the tenant moves out. Even though completing these inspections when the property is vacant is ideal, conducting an inspection on at least an annual basis while the unit is occupied is just as important when making your case. Don't think of interim inspections as an invasion of privacy: think of it as protecting your investment by ensuring that the tenant is taking care of your property.

Try to encourage your tenants to attend the interim inspections with you. Best practice is to work with the tenant when scheduling the inspection by offering two separate times for the inspection. This not only shows the tenant that they matter to you and that their time is valuable, but it helps build a rapport with the tenant which will be vital in future dealings with them. However, if you propose two separate times for the inspection to take place and the tenant doesn't agree to attend, the landlord can and should still complete the inspection without the tenant with proper, legal notice: just be sure to note if the tenant was present for the inspection.

Always keep records. In Oregon, landlords are required to keep all documentation including inspection reports for six years after a tenancy has ended. When in doubt think of it this way: if it wasn't written, it probably cannot be proven. When the landlord chooses not to carry out an inspection either before or after the tenancy, the landlord will have a difficult time proving why they deducted anything from the security deposit for physical damage to the property that goes beyond normal wear-and-tear. If a landlord makes a deduction from the security deposit without adequate proof, the tenant can take legal action to get their security deposit back. That is stress and money you could have saved simply by keeping better records.

### **Helpful Tips for Completing the Inspection of an Occupied Unit:**

- Try to arrange your inspection during a weekday.
- Be thorough: open drawers, cabinets, pantries, and closets; get on the floor and look under sinks; inspect the seals, the wear and tear, cleanliness, and overall condition in the refrigerator and the stove.
- Inspection reports can also include pictures – consider taking a camera or your phone so that you can take pictures or a video. Offer to share the reports, pictures, and videos with the tenants for best practice.
- Ask your tenants to point out anything that could be considered damage and make sure it gets written down. If the tenant will not be present for the inspection, ask them to leave a note on the kitchen counter listing anything they'd like you to look at or document.

- Is the housekeeping good? We all know that poor housekeeping will attract bugs and sometimes vermin so you want the home to be clean and tidy.
- Are there any signs of unauthorized occupants or unauthorized pets?
- Check for plumbing maintenance needs as well. See if the lint trap in the dryer is kept clean and be sure to take a look at the washing machine hoses. A frayed hose could indicate a potential leak. Inspect the toilet tanks. Check the flapper valve and make sure it seals properly and does not need to be replaced. If the landlord is paying a water bill, there is not always a lot of motivation for the tenant to report a slight leak in that flapper valve. Even if the tenant is responsible for water, it does not take a lot of money or effort to replace a flapper valve.

Think of interim inspection reports as evidence to support a future case. Of course no landlord ever wishes to be part of a legal battle justifying charges against a tenant for damages but it happens all the time. Good record-keeping, proof, and evidence will be your saving grace if you find yourself in that situation.

Your local landlord organization can sell standard inspection forms for purchase by landlords. These forms provide a complete list of important property items so that issues don't go undetected during your inspections.

*Katie Poole–Hussa is a Licensed Property Manager in the State of Oregon, a Continuing Education Provider, Chair of the Education Committee for the RHA Oregon, and General Manager of the Portland Oregon branch of Acorn Property Management, LLC. She can be reached with questions or comments at 971-352-6760 or email [Katie@AcornPM.net](mailto:Katie@AcornPM.net).*