

## **The Ten Commandments of Maintenance**

**By Howard Bookstaff, Attorney**

At a recent seminar, we outlined 10 issues maintenance personnel should pay attention to from a management perspective. The issues discussed at the seminar can be valuable to management teams in every apartment community. Here is an outline of the issues discussed and the thoughts behind each issue:

**1. Respond to work orders quickly.** It is required that a diligent effort be made to repair or remedy conditions that affect the physical health or safety of an ordinary resident. Priorities should be given to areas that may cause more significant problems if not addressed (i.e. water leaks or security-related issues). Obtain as much information as you can about the work to be performed and take all necessary equipment with you.

If for any reason you feel unqualified to handle the task, the maintenance supervisor (or manager) should be notified immediately. This will enable management to take the proper steps to retain the services of an independent contractor qualified to perform the work.

***Acting in a hostile, abusive, rude or argumentative manner toward residents will be detrimental to your goal of maintaining a professional business-like relationship with residents.***

**2. Write clearly and neatly on all work orders.** Work orders provide an important source of information. When we are attempting to defend against a claim that work was not performed properly or in a timely fashion, work orders provide the documentary evidence necessary to defend the case. Problems develop when the work orders are not legible or do not contain the appropriate information.

Each work order should designate what work was done and whether the problem was resolved. All work orders should be dated. The name(s) of the maintenance personnel performing the work should be clearly printed. The technician(s) should also sign the work order. If the problem was not resolved, the supervisor (or manager) should be notified immediately.

**4. Get the work order from the proper authority.** It would be beneficial if each community had designated instructions with respect to the assignment of work orders. This allows management to effectively follow through on request for work and provide guidelines to maintenance personnel with respect to obtaining and taking instruction. If a resident requests work to be done, a work order should be filled out to document the request.

**4. Comply with an effective key to control system.** Maintenance personnel should follow instructions with respect to taking and returning keys and with respect to giving keys to others. Keys should be returned immediately after leaving a unit. Keys should not be taken off the property on lunch breaks or given to other vendors or contractors. Obviously, keys should not be given to unauthorized personnel. Additionally, unauthorized persons should never be allowed in a unit, even when accompanied by maintenance personnel. Units should never be left unlocked or open.

**5. Keep company business confidential.** If maintenance personnel do not get along with the manager or other office staff, residents should not be used as “sounding boards” for the maintenance personnel to vent interoffice frustrations. This will come back to haunt you. The business of one resident should never be discussed with another resident. As a general rule, residents in a community love to talk about each other. Maintenance personnel should not fuel the resident’s desire to gossip!

**6. Do not fraternize with residents.** The primary concern with fraternizing with residents (your customers) is not raised when you are friends (or girlfriend or boyfriend) with the resident; the primary concern is when you cease being friends (or break up). Also, getting too “social” with your residents may cause its own set of problems. Getting drunk together at the local watering hole may seem like a fun bonding experience; however, this is also a good way to violate commandment No. 5 (see above).

**7. Maintain professionalism at all times.** Remember, you and your company want to portray a professional landlord-tenant relationship with your residents. This will be jeopardized to the extent that maintenance personnel do not act consistently with this philosophy. Taking family members (your children) on work order calls is not advisable.

Acting in a hostile, abusive, rude or argumentative manner toward residents will be detrimental to your goal of maintaining a professional business-like relationship with residents. If residents act in an abusive or hostile fashion (as they do on occasion), do not respond by acting in the same way. Leave the scene and advise the manager of the resident's conduct.

**8. Report violations of leases or rules.** Maintenance personnel are often on the front line of resident complaints. They are also on the front line with respect to witnessing resident violations. Report drug paraphernalia in a unit, report unauthorized occupants, report rude, abusive and offensive behavior. Maintenance personnel should be well informed on what to do when violations are witnessed.

**9. Do not try to address security concerns.** If residents are concerned about their security, residents may seek advice from anyone who works in the apartment community. Neither management nor maintenance can represent that there is any type of police protection provided by the owner or manager of the community. Maintenance personnel should refer security-related questions to management personnel, who should be trained to respond in an appropriate fashion. If there is an emergency, call 911.

**10. Treat all residents equally.** Maintenance personnel should be instructed to comply with all Fair Housing laws. Residents should not be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, handicap or national origin. All Fair Housing questions, such as request for reasonable accommodations, should be referred by the maintenance personnel to management.

Maintenance personnel perform an invaluable function in any community. However, as important as the repairs they perform are, it is equally important that maintenance and management work together to be sure that each knows and understands their respective roles in making the community a great place to live and work.

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