

What to Do With Drug-Using Residents by CD Publications

Dealing with a resident who is struggling with a chemical dependence can be quite a chore for a property manager, but ignoring the problem isn't going to make it go away. It is critical to address the situation by steering the residents toward services that can help them.

James Waller, of the National Center for Housing Management, says giving leeway to someone involved in the drug underworld makes the manager an enabler. The resident in question needs to be dealt with.

"You have to hold that person accountable for their responsibilities and for their behavior," Waller tells Landlord Law & Multi-Housing Report. "You can't buy into excuses."

Dealing with a Chemically-Dependant Resident

Waller tells us that using "the power of the lease" can be an effective way to force someone who is using drugs to seek help. Dishing out "tough love" to a resident with a chemical dependency – whether it is narcotics, prescription drugs or alcohol – is key, he says.

"Users will quite often, if you hold them accountable for their behavior, say they need help... they'll come to that point," Waller says.

Public and federally-subsidized residents are more likely to seek help out of desperation because of zero tolerance or "one strike" rules mandated by the federal government. If they're thrown out of a Section 8 property, for example, "Where can they go next? Waller asks rhetorically.

While Waller says he does not buy into the theory of letting many people slide, those at a smaller facility who may have a strong standing relationship with the tenant in question might come up with some conditional remedies on a limited basis to avoid the eviction. However, if the user doesn't get his/her act together quickly, the manager has to get the problem tenant off the property through the legal system.

"The key goal, objective of the manager is not to solve the problem for the whole city or country," Waller tells Landlord Law & Multi-Housing Report. "The manager has to keep his or her eye on the ball and realize what their main objective is."

The main objectives, whether somewhat cold or not, are making sure rent is coming in and that the few bad tenants don't drag down the quality of housing for the majority of good ones.

Dealing with a Drug Trade at a Property

Residents selling drugs on a property are residents you do not want! Managers need to make things difficult on such residents, Waller say. "If you make it uncomfortable enough, they'll look for somewhere else to go," he says.

With drug trade in an area come sizeable quality-of-life issues, especially in terms of personal safety. The manager needs to step back from a confrontation with someone who may be violent or associated with nefarious people, alert the authorities and file for an eviction through the court system, says Waller. It's best to let the people trained to deal

with such situations do their jobs and quickly cut down the “layers of danger” at a property, he adds.

Waller says drug users and deals have made a few turns through the court system – usually more so than the property manager. “A lot of these residents know how to play the game,” Waller tells us.

That’s why making sure your lease and documentation of agreement violations is crucial. Though federally-subsidized housing has strict rules already in place, managers in the private sector should be reviewing the leases and updating them as soon as they become aware of lessons stemming from other incidents.

“If it’s not in the lease, your chance of doing something [to the renter in question] is close to nil,” Waller warns.

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