



Background Checks Important for Contractor and Trade Employees As Well!

by S. Sam Cooper

Oh no, not again. The dishwasher is leaking for the second time this month. “Mr. Fix-It” sitting over there on the couch apparently didn’t know what he was doing. I guess I am going to have to call the plumber.

Phonebook....plumbers....so many choices. This one looks nice. Professional, courteous and reasonably priced; even same day service. Three hours later, he shows up in a Volkswagen Van. Since when do plumbers do service calls from the back of a VW? He doesn’t look professional. At least I think it’s a he; long hair, earrings and bright pink hi-tops. Looking through the window at this thing coming to my door, I am having second thoughts about letting this stranger into my home.

Now, this example may seem a bit extreme, but there is no way you would knowingly invite this person into your home. You probably wouldn’t even send him into your worst enemy’s home. Yet, as a property manager, it is your responsibility to make the decision of who enters a resident’s home or apartment everyday. Your renters don’t have the benefit of looking at the phonebook and screening a specific company. They are required to open the door to whomever you see fit to send, or worse, be gone while the tech or maintenance is in their home.

As a standard of practice, most property managers have background checks performed on each employee and resident that works or lives in their community. This serves to protect the interest of everyone on the property. Rarely, if ever, do managers question the background of the plumber, electrician or painter that is in and around the community all day long. These individuals, who often interact directly with the residents, can and possibly will have some sort of criminal history. This is often the same history that that would keep them from being approved to live in the very property they are maintaining. As an industry, are we doing all we can to protect the residents, our greatest assets? Let’s examine this concern from their perspective. During the application process, the property screens each potential resident for any criminal background, evictions and credit history. Staff tells him or her that the community does this for the safety of all the residents. The property then approves or denies the individual for residency based on the findings from these checks.

If approved, the renter moves in with an increased sense of safety and well-being, believing that everyone around him or her has passed the same criteria, including the workers that enter their residences. Is a false sense of security being generated? Based

on what I have seen over the years, few, if any, contractors and trades perform adequate background checks on their employees.

Added to all of this is the prevalence of unauthorized aliens in the workforce of many of these service providers. In the past, these workers have come and gone on your properties as they please. They have surely entered residences to repair or install necessary items. Unlike a legally authorized employee, these aliens have incorrect or incomplete information identifying who they are and where they live. They have the ability to commit crime here, often on your property, and then leave the country the next week. The lack of recourse involved in cases like this leaves the employer, the property manager and the resident little choice but to move on.

Mandating investigative background checks on the vendor level will be one way that management companies can protect themselves and those they service. ***[Editor's Note: Please read last month's article where a Burbank, California-based management company and landlord were instructed by a jury to pay \$12 million dollars when a female tenant was raped and killed by the building's maintenance man!]***

The following should be required to have verifiable background checks performed prior to entering your communities:

- Maintenance workers
- Carpet cleaners
- Flooring installation
- Pest control
- Glass repair
- Water/fire restoration
- HVAC contractors
- Plumbers
- Painters
- Carpenters

Now, back to the pink hi-tops. I open the door and the young gentleman (yes, it's a he) presents his credentials, including proof that he has had a background check performed. Although put off by his appearance, I let him into my home. It turns out he is a charming young man, working one last summer before joining the Army and losing the hair. He repairs the dishwasher and leaves his card in case something else happens. As I close the door and say goodbye, I think about how wrong I was about this person. If not for the assurance of his background check results, I may have sent him away and had the snoring blob on the couch take another crack at fixing what he probably broke the last time.

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