

### **39 Money-Saving “Short Cuts” for Rental Housing Providers** **by Bob Ruda**

1. To spruce up old, dirty and tired wall switches and plugs without replacing them, use spray paint made for plastic. Two quick coats and they will now match your new switch covers and look like you replaced them.
2. Have a drop ceiling that is dirty, stained or mismatched? Don't buy new panels, paint the old ones. Take them down and roll on a coat of paint. While the panels are down, paint the rails too. Put them back up and the ceiling will look new.
3. Use a Mister Clean sponge for marks on walls, trim, floor tiles and even countertops. Works better than liquid products such as CLR for cleaning hard water deposits and water marks from chrome, brass and stainless steel bath and kitchen fixtures.
4. For real tough stains that like to bleed such a magic market, nicotine and even mold, use the solvent based stain killer. It really stinks but it does the job in one coat.
5. Keep the carpet scraps left over from when you re-carpet a unit. These are great to use when patching is required to fix impossible stains, burn marks or holes when the unit turns over.
6. When buying a rental property, bigger is not always better. The larger the unit, the more walls to paint, the more floor to carpet and the more to clean when the unit turns over.
7. From any new floor or wall tile job, always keep four extra tiles. You will have a perfect match for small repairs in the future.
8. Vinyl blinds are cheap but look sad (and cheap) in only 12 months. Unless you are selling the unit, stick with metal for a much longer life and save money in the long run.
9. Do your electric wall heaters look yellowed or rusty? Spray paint them with epoxy appliance paint for an “as new” look.
10. Avoid painting stained woodwork if at all possible. Re-staining the nicks and scuffs is a lot faster and looks better than constantly painting as the unit turns over. Dark or even medium shade woodwork hides a multitude of sins.
11. Use one color, brand and type of paint in as many of your units as possible. Later, when you can get away with just touching up, you will always have a perfect match. I can't count the money I saved by not repainting the whole unit when it just needed a few walls or spots to freshen it up. Using the same paint also insures that you won't have to use more than one coat to cover the old paint.
12. Do you have trouble cleaning grease stains on the wall behind the stove just below the range hood? Consider installing metal back splashes for behind the stove. These are available in colors for about \$30 and clean up quickly.
13. Did a water leak wet the carpet? Pull up the carpet at the edges and throw any wet pad out. Prop up the carpet off the floor and keep air moving around it. If you catch it in time, you have a chance of saving the carpet. You cannot save a wet carpet by leaving it on the floor and simply sucking up the water with a wet and dry vac. If the pad is wet, you can never get it dry.
14. Don't buy cheap paint no matter what or where you want to paint. Your time is far more valuable (or your painter's). You will not save money. You will waste time putting on a second or third coat and the stuff will drip, run and splatter more and you will spend more effort to keep the job need. I use Behr paint sold at Home Depot. I think it has the best coverage, application and durability for the money.
15. Learn how to re-screen your torn screens yourself. Buy the kit and roll a screen and experiment. Very simple to do and much, much less expensive than buying a new screen or paying someone to do it for you. They sell a “make it yourself” screen frame kit for when your frame is broken or lost. I can re-work five screens in the same time it would take me just to drive and drop off screen at the hardware store to be repaired.
16. Have a large hole in a wall or wood paneling but short on time? You could replace the whole panel or cut out and put in a new drywall patch on a standard wall. Depending on where the hole is and how big it is, think about buying a cold air return register cover using it to make the hole vanish.

17. Flexible switch and plug covers are a better choice for plugs or switches that don't align perfectly with the wall. These covers accommodate plugs or switches that are recessed or stand out a little too much for the standard rigid plastic covers.
18. Metal sleeve repair kits that cover around the door knobs are great for fixing a door that has the lock busted out or damaged and less expensive than replacing the door. They also give added security to any interior or exterior door for very little.
19. Buy new pan liners for electric stoves rather than spending time cleaning the really nasty ones. Your time is too valuable.
20. Buy a self-cleaning oven over the less expensive non-self cleaning one. This will save tons of time cleaning when the tenant moves out even though they left the apartment "clean".
21. Flat paint is harder to clean but does the best job of hiding imperfections in the walls. Eggshell is a good compromise and touches up better than a flat.
22. Use light fixtures that have simple smooth lines. The more ornate the fixture, the harder it is to clean.
23. Pet urine smell in the wood or concrete floor? Try OdorX sprayed on it. You may still have to finally paint over with a solvent based concrete paint or varnish.
24. Self-stick vinyl tile is great for going right over old vinyl, concrete, wood underlayment and other stable surfaces. Costs much less than a one piece vinyl floor or the new imitation wood flooring material installed by a professional. The tiles are also easier for the amateur to install. Don't buy anything priced less than \$0.75 a tile. The less expensive stuff doesn't stick as well and they are not cut perfectly. They will look cheap, not last as long and simply not be worth the money and time.
25. For a fresh, more modern look, try using a light gray or similar color as a neutral rather than beige. It will look good with wood floors and the tenant's furniture.
26. Shop at the "Dollar" stores for items such as toilet seats, shower curtains and similar items.
27. I always provide a shower curtain liner for new rentals. Tenants never remember to bring the old one with them and while they are "getting round" to buying anew one, water is spraying on my floors.
28. Should you buy good carpet or cheap carpet? I find that I almost always replace carpet not because it wore out, but rather because of permanent stains, burns and misuse. I have stopped ripping up and throwing out carpet that has lots of wear left but looks like the devil. I buy only cheap carpet and don't cry when I have to replace it.
29. I don't replace a carpet pad if it is less than two years old unless it has urine stains or other extraordinary problems.
30. Throw out roller covers rather than cleaning them. It's not worth the time. If you are in the middle of a job with latex paint, cover the roller in plastic (plastic bags from the grocery stores work well), and it will keep until the next day.
31. Keep a bottle of rubbing alcohol handy. Not only is it very inexpensive, but it worth a try on some stains that other cleaners will not budge. Also comes in handy for minor cuts.
32. I don't caulk around the base of the toilet. If the wax ring seal breaks, I don't want the water to be trapped under the base. I want to know it is leaking immediately. I don't want the leak to rot the floor before I find out.
33. If you are still buying your leases one at a time or in a box from the office supply store – please don't tell me. You can find good lease forms free from many different places and print them out yourself for the cost of the paper. **[AOA members can download free forms at [www.aoausa.com](http://www.aoausa.com).]**
34. Glade plug-ins are great for removing strange and stale odors in your units. Your place needs to look and smell clean to prospective tenants.
35. Rather than replacing sad looking floor registers, spray them with appliance paint and they look new.
36. Painter's caulk does a better job than spackle for filling nail holes in walls. Less mess and easier to paint over.
37. Don't install appliances in an empty rental. Often a tenant already owns several appliances. If the new tenant does not have a particular appliance, lease this item to

- them for a small additional fee (not including repairs) such as \$10 or \$15 a month. The appliances will pay for themselves quickly.
38. Don't sell a house with appliances included. Let the buyer request that they be included with his offer. Why give away a bargaining chip at the beginning? If the buyer doesn't want them, use them for another property, donate them for a tax deduction or sell on eBay.
  39. Rather than buying cheap kitchen and bath faucets (unless you're fixing up to sell), use a better, sturdier brand such as Moen with its replaceable valve parts. I have faucets almost 30 years old and still functioning. It's much less expensive to install a few new parts than to replace a whole unit plus it's faster.

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