

Happy Renters AND Safe Properties for the Holidays **by D.L. Graham**

The holiday season is a time to bring out the best in human nature. But, it can also be a time of increased stress, short tempers, and rude behavior. How can you best keep an atmosphere of harmony and good will at your property, while still preserving the safety of your residents and your property?

Management often posts lists of rules at this time of year, and renters frequently perceive them as unreasonable, inconsiderate or onerous. Management desires sensible safety precautions, and renters just want to have fun. Here are some easy steps you can take to prevent tensions before they begin. It is often the little things that make all the difference between a frustrating holiday season, and one that is filled with joy and goodwill toward all.

Set Reasonable Holiday Policies

If possible, meet with your residents to discuss holiday safety precautions and the reasons behind any special rules during the holiday season. If a meeting isn't feasible, communicate your policies in writing early in December. Keep the tone of your policies positive, and avoid producing a list of "thou shalt not's".

Be sure to give clear notice of where and to whom to ask questions and request clarification. Additional telephone numbers, such as for taxi service, nearby garages, nearby hotels for out of town guests, a telephone number for Christmas tree pick-up and so on, will create an air of mutual generosity that will keep residents happy during what can be an otherwise stressful time.

Parties and Noise

Since there are more parties during the holiday season than at other times of year, remind your residents to be considerate of their neighbors. Noise levels must be kept reasonable. If your building rules state that parties must conclude by a certain hour, the party givers should adhere to the rule. If you wish to make an exception, such as for New Year's Eve, inform all residents about it far in advance.

Parking

At most rental properties, parking space is at a premium. Remind the residents where their guests are to park. Ask them to tell their friends not to infringe on the rights of other residents. They should know you will have illegally parked vehicles towed, if necessary. Be firm about this, but not threatening.

Responsibility for Guests

Remind your residents that they are responsible for the actions of their guests. Encourage them to have their guests use taxis or other transportation if they have too much to drink.

Security

If your property has a controlled entrance, ask the residents to notify management about their holiday parties in advance. If possible, the guest list should be given to the manager or guard.

Holiday Decorations

Perhaps the most controversial area of disagreement can be the subject of holiday decorations. The property owner who sets extremely strict rules limiting or forbidding decorations may be perceived as the worst Scrooge of the season, even if he was only thinking of the safety

of the residents and the property. Be realistic about any rules you make, and be sure to communicate them to the residents well in advance. If decorations are permitted on windows, let your residents know by what date they must be removed. If wreaths or other decorations are permitted on doors, let them know what types of fasteners can be used.

It is unrealistic to establish a policy prohibiting lights on Christmas trees. Most residents find this completely unreasonable, no matter how much the owner may explain that it is a fire safety precaution urged by his insurance company. The same reaction greets the rule that only artificial trees are permitted. There are many sources for Christmas tree safety tips, which you can distribute to your residents. If your building has a common area, you can decorate it according to your approved guidelines to show how beautiful and creative decorations can be and still fall within good safety practice.

The urge to decorate for the holidays should be encouraged, because it makes for a more cohesive and stable population of renters, a good idea by anybody's measure.

In summary, good, positive communication regarding your rules and expectations at holiday time can greatly increase the safety and awareness of your residents, add to their respect for you as their rental property owner, and keep the holidays safe and happy for everyone.

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