

Help! My Tenant is Filthy!
By Nick Sidoti, R.A.M.

Q. Dear Nick, I have a six-unit building. In five of the apartments the tenants seem to be turning over every year or two. The other apartment has been continuously rented for the past five years. Unfortunately, it is causing me lots of aggravation because this is the apartment where Mrs. Filth lives.

She pays her rent right on time every month, but her unit is always filthy, and the mess overflows into the hallway and the yard. In addition, she brought a cat and two dogs into the apartment, even though pets are against the rules. I am tempted to get rid of her, but I like the idea of having a stable rent paying resident. If I ask her to leave, I am afraid that she'll probably stiff me on a month's rent. What should I do? Ina Dilema, Waukegan, IL.

A. Dear Dilema, Bite the bullet. The first thing you said about this tenant was that she was causing you aggravation. Is the aggravation worth it? Another thing you mentioned was that the other tenants turn over every one to two years. Do you think that they might be leaving due to her presence? Are they becoming aggravated with her filth, especially the mess in the yard?

You mentioned that Mrs. Filth has a cat and two dogs, which are against the rules. This is bad enough, but knowing that she is filthy, I can imagine what the place will look like, and smell like when she leaves, whether you ask her to leave or not.

To give you a very direct answer to your question...GET HER OUT NOW! Cut your losses, get rid of the aggravation, clean up your rental and find yourself a nice tenant who is willing to keep the place clean.

If you are going to survive as a real estate investor, the one thing that you need to remember is that you are in this for the long haul. It only takes one bad tenant to cause you enough aggravation to push you out of rentals.

As far as losing the one month's rent when you ask her to leave, I would bet that if you didn't ask her to leave and some month, of her choice, she decided to not pay and then skipped on you, you'd be happy. At least if you ask her to leave, you can choose the timing, and have the satisfaction of being in control. Don't worry about losing one month's rent. This isn't the first time, and it won't be the last time. This tenant can do far more damage than that by neglecting and abusing your property.

You should ask Mrs. Filth to leave when it is most convenient for you. This would probably be a couple of months before your prime rental season. Then you will have enough time to get her out, clean up her unit, and be ready and waiting for a good, clean tenant. As an added bonus, you may also stop some of your other turnover for the year. The tenants may not feel that they need to leave if Mrs. Filth is moving out.

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