

Do Landlords Get Vacations Too?

by Nick Sidoti

Dear Nick: With the 24 hour per day, seven day per week responsibilities of being a landlord, how do you ever get any time off for a vacation? *A Tired Landlord.*

Dear Tired Landlord: This can a problem for small landlords, but it is one they need to address or they will soon be out of the business. While you are still real small, say with a few units, get your brother-in-law or a friend who is thinking about becoming a landlord to watch your apartments for you and take the calls. When you get to the point that you have a staff and an office, they can handle the problems. It is at that awkward stage in between where most folks have trouble coming up with solutions.

Fortunately, this is a question for which I have some answers, since as you know, I do quite a bit of traveling, and I don't have a staff.

One of your first alternatives is to leave your tenants with some information about what to do in case of emergency. You probably want to do this anyway, since even when you are in town, you aren't always home. I would equate this with the type of form you leave the babysitter when you leave them in charge of your infant for the evening. Here is an example of the sort of things that should be on the sheet.

Fire: Call 911. If you have a fire, call the fire department, get everyone out of the building, try to put it out, and then call me. Leave a message if I am not home. If there is extensive damage, the house needs to be boarded up, or you need to make other living arrangements, please call the emergency contact number I have given you.

Broken Pipes: SHUT OFF THE WATER! If there is a shut off valve that will allow water to come to other fixtures, but will isolate this problem, it is no longer an emergency. Leave a message on my machine. If you are now without water, call the emergency repair number I have provided you.

Leave the tenant with instructions about flooding, earthquakes, and other things that you would define as emergencies. Also leave them instructions about what to do if they have minor repairs that need attention.

You don't have to tell the tenants that you are leaving town, but, you probably should tell the folks whom you listed as the emergency repair contacts. This is probably the most critical element of going away with peace of mind that everything will be handled. Find someone, preferably in the trades, who has the ability to assess the problem, and either make the repair, or have it made. They also need the skills to tell the difference between a real emergency, and a "tenant emergency." Ideally, they will be able to calm the tenant and solve the problem without your intervention.

Unfortunately, in most instances, you should also leave a number with the emergency contact person where they can reach you. Good luck and have a nice trip!

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