



# The BULLETIN

Quarterly news about Section 8 in Seattle • JUNE 2003 • For landlords and service providers

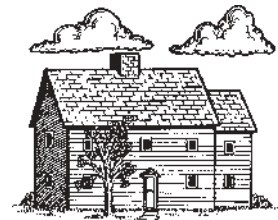
**1** Ever wonder how SHA responds to complaints? Director Kathy Roseth explains, this page.

**2** Why do units fail inspections, and what happens if they do? Read all about it!

**3** Are your tenants moving? Find out about SHA's new rules for tenant moves in this issue.

## Peace in the neighborhood

PorchLight director Kathy Roseth on SHA's role in responding to complaints about Section 8 tenants



Dear housing provider,

The Seattle Housing Authority has a strong interest in working with neighbors of problem properties, especially if families assisted by the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) are involved. We take complaints seriously and we respond quickly.

If you've ever wondered how SHA responds to complaints about Section 8 tenants, please read on.

**First, we investigate the complaint.** We ask the person making the complaint to give us specific information, in writing. Who did what, when, where, how? Then we check it out. Is the problem household in fact assisted by the voucher program? (Sometimes neighbors make that assumption incorrectly.) Have we had other complaints about this household, or about the owner of the property?

Then we get the family's side of the story, and also the property owner's. Does the owner consider the family to be in violation of the lease? Is the owner responsibly enforcing the lease? We gather as many facts as we can before taking action.

**We protect the privacy of the family.** Whether a family is assisted by the Housing Choice Voucher Program is a private matter between SHA, the family and the owner of the property.

We follow up on all complaints, but our actions are not always visible to concerned neighbors because we do not share confidential information with them. We know this can be frustrating, but our obligation to protect confidentiality is very important.

**We give the family the benefit of due process.** If we determine that a family is in violation of their obligations under the voucher program – including serious violations of their lease – we will take action to the extent that we can.

Depending on the situation and the strength of supporting documentation, we may issue a warning to the family, or we may proceed directly to terminating their assistance. Before any family's assistance can be terminated,

however, the family is entitled by regulation and SHA policy to a hearing before an independent hearing officer.

Once we take the step of issuing a termination letter to a family we will defend that action as vigorously as we can, but the independent hearing officer may side with the family and give them another chance. After all, it is a serious thing to deprive a family of their access to an affordable home.

Our case is always strengthened by the documentation we have supporting complaints against the family, such as copies of police reports, which neighbors can often assist in providing.

If you have questions or concerns about how SHA responds to neighborhood complaints, please let us know. For more information on this topic, please feel free to contact SHA's Sarah Carman at 206-239-1625. Also, please see the articles inside this issue for information about easy ways to avoid landlord-tenant conflicts.

As always, thanks for reading The Bulletin. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

# Resident resources

## *Helping voucher-holders be great tenants*

We all need a little help from time to time, and Section 8 tenants are no different. As we all know, happy and healthy tenants tend to be more dependable tenants. If your tenants need assistance, try referring them to one of these well-known providers:

### RESIDENT CHOICES

A program of Family Services of King County, Resident Choices provides free counseling, information and referrals about financial assistance, housing concerns, employment issues, community resources, child care and many other issues. Their trained counselors are available in five locations: West Seattle (206-923-1843), Northgate

(206-357-2500), Lake City (206-367-2362), Jackson Park (206-357-2500) and Rainier Vista (in the Neighborhood House office – 206-461-4568).

### SENIOR INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

If a tenant over the age of 60 needs help but doesn't know who to contact, refer them to Senior Information and Assistance at 206-448-3110 or 1-800-972-9990. Their trained specialists can help callers find the right resource.

Keep in mind that these are just two of the many excellent service providers for Section 8 residents in Seattle. Keep an eye on future issues of The Bulletin for more information on helpful organizations!

A regular column from the Seattle Housing Authority's inspection staff

## *Inspectors corner*

### Why do units fail HQS inspections?

All rental units subsidized by the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) are required to meet federally-mandated Housing Quality Standards (HQS). HQS is a comprehensive program established by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to ensure that the housing it subsidizes remains decent, safe and sanitary. SHA inspects Section 8 units before tenants move in and at least once a year for as long as the unit is subsidized by Section 8.

We are often asked by landlords how to prepare units to pass HQS inspections. That's understandable, because HQS guidelines are complicated and detailed. To help you prepare for inspections, we've compiled a list of common reasons for failure. If any of these items apply to your units, be sure to address the problem before your next inspection. Keep in mind that these are not the only criteria for failing, and that HQS covers many other aspects of a unit. For more in-depth information about HQS guidelines, visit our Web site at [www.sea-pha.org](http://www.sea-pha.org).

### COMMON REASONS FOR FAILED INSPECTIONS

- Gas or oil furnaces are not operating at the time of the initial inspection.
- Smoke detectors are located in a kitchen.
- Smoke detectors are **not** located near a sleeping area, on all levels of the unit, or in a common laundry room.
- Junction boxes are open, exposing wires and wirenuts.

- Outlets or light switch cover plates are broken or missing.
- Hot water tanks do not have a pressure relief valve and/or discharge line.
- Window panes are broken.
- Range burner pans are missing.
- Staircases with four or more stairs do not have a railing.
- Doors have double-keyed deadbolts.
- Deteriorated paint is present on the interior or exterior of buildings. (The concern is that lead-based paint may be present. This rule applies to buildings built before 1978 and occupied by children under the age of 6 or a pregnant tenant.)
- A building or unit is being used as a duplex, triplex, accessory unit or multi-unit building **but is not legally zoned** as such by Seattle's Department of Construction and Land Use.

### WHAT HAPPENS IF MY UNIT FAILS INSPECTION?

If SHA inspects a unit and the inspector says that the unit "failed" the inspection, that means that items must be fixed before the unit can pass. Again, units must pass the HQS inspection to qualify for Section 8 subsidy.

After the failed inspection, the inspector alerts SHA's inspection scheduler. The scheduler arranges a second inspection and sends a letter to the owner (and a copy of the letter to the family) noting what time the additional inspection will take place and what must be fixed. In most cases, owners will be given at least 30 days from the date of the letter to make all necessary repairs.

*News you can use*

## Frequently asked questions

**Q: How do I notify SHA when my contact information changes, or when I've sold a property?**

A: If any of your ownership or contact information (address, telephone number, name, Social Security number, tax ID number, etc.) changes, you must contact PorchLight in writing. Mail your letter to the Seattle Housing Authority Section 8 Program c/o New Move-In Desk, PorchLight Housing Center, 907 N.W. Ballard Way, Seattle, WA 98107-4637.

**Q: When is the best time for landlords to do move-out inspections with tenants?**

A: Landlords should do move-out inspections as soon as possible after they get notice that tenants will be moving. The sooner you do the inspection, the sooner you will know the state of your property, and whether you will have to make any repairs. Remember, all units have to pass a Housing Quality Standards inspection before a new voucher-assisted family can move in. See page 2.



**Q: When can I let Section 8 tenants move into a unit?**

A: Voucher-assisted tenants cannot move in to a unit or sign a lease before SHA's inspectors have visited the unit and determined that it meets federally mandated Housing Quality Standards. See page 2. For more information on the inspection process and Housing Quality Standards, visit us online at [www.sea-pha.org](http://www.sea-pha.org) (click on "Section 8 housing").

**Q: Can the housing authority help me evict a problematic tenant?**

A: Please keep in mind that SHA is not a landlord in the voucher program. That means that SHA can terminate Section 8 assistance in some cases, but cannot initiate eviction procedures or enforce the terms of the lease signed by you and the tenant. For more information on how SHA responds to tenant complaints and determines whether assistance should be terminated, see the front page.

A regular column about cooperation among owners, renters and SHA

## *Working together*

### New rules about family moves

Did you know that some of our rules regarding moves by Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) families have changed? In the past, most Section 8 families could move any time by giving at least 20 days' written notice to owners (if their lease was month-to-month). Furthermore, if families were in the midst of a 12-month lease term, they could move if owners consented to break the leases.

Since Section 8's revised Administrative Plan was approved in July 2002, SHA has adopted new rules regarding when Section 8 families can terminate their leases and move to new units.

The new rules state that unless there are circumstances beyond the control of families which require a move or transfer for safety or other good cause, they will not be permitted to move within SHA's jurisdiction, or outside SHA's jurisdiction under portability procedures, during the initial year of assisted occupancy.

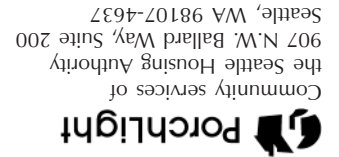
The new rules also specify that unless there are circumstances beyond the control of families which require a move or transfer for safety or other good cause, they will not be permitted to move more than once in a 12-month period.

In practice, this means that whether or not families are in a month-to-month lease or an initial lease term, they cannot move more than once every 12 months and keep their assistance. The one exception to this rule, as stated above, allows for more than one move in a year for "safety or other good cause," such as:

- A family's house is rendered unsafe by fire or an owner's refusal to pay utilities that are the owner's responsibility.
- A family qualifies for an accommodation due to a disability.
- An owner is selling a property to a new owner who will not be renting the property.

Keep in mind that because of these new rules, SHA will not honor mutual terminations of leases simply because owners and Section 8 families are not getting along or families are violating leases. If a family is violating their lease, the owner must enforce the lease as prescribed by law.

If a family is not violating their lease but is nonetheless having conflicts with an owner, SHA recommends that both parties seek third-party intervention to help resolve the disagreement. For conflict resolution resources and contacts, visit our Web site at [www.sea-pha.org](http://www.sea-pha.org) (click on "PorchLight").



## What is PorchLight?

The PorchLight Housing Center is a division of the Seattle Housing Authority, the city's largest provider of low-income and affordable housing. PorchLight manages the Section 8 program and applications for public housing.

## A focus on service

Located in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood, PorchLight is a place where people seeking housing assistance can learn about and apply for opportunities at a convenient one-stop location. We provide the highest quality customer service to clients, participating owners and all of our partners in Seattle's affordable housing continuum.

## Want to learn more?

Call 206-239-1500 or visit us at [www.sea-pha.org](http://www.sea-pha.org) (click on "PorchLight"). We look forward to working with you!

## Did you know...

...that SHA's Impact Property Services provides lead-based paint services? Impact Property Services offers affordable, efficient service for your deteriorated paint problems. We have a high level of expertise from years of experience and respond quickly to service requests. We can provide both EPA certified lead-based paint risk assessors and EPA certified lead-safe workers, including painters and carpenters. Call us today at 206-932-4685 or 206-932-4243.



...that you can find support for owners on our Web site? Visit us at [www.sea-pha.org](http://www.sea-pha.org) today and browse the helpful resources under "Housing" and "PorchLight."

...that the City of Seattle provides free information about property owner rights and city ordinances? Call 206-684-7979 for more information.

PorchLight telephone: 206-239-1500 | PorchLight fax: 206-239-1770 | PorchLight e-mail: [porchlight.info@sea-pha.org](mailto:porchlight.info@sea-pha.org)

SECTION 8 CASELOADS	NEW MOVE-IN DESK	HOUSING INSPECTORS	OTHER CONTACTS FOR OWNERS	OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS	OCCUPANCY MANAGER
Aa - Bot:	206-239-1580	Telephone:	206-239-1666	206-239-1638	206-239-1620
Bou - Ford:	206-239-1638	Fax:	206-239-1645	206-239-1628	
Fore - Jus:	206-239-1628		Annual inspections:	206-239-1642	
K - Nguyen, S:	206-239-1642		To report address, management	206-239-1652	
Nguyen, T - Smith, L:	206-239-1652		or other ownership changes:	206-239-1617	
Smith, M - Z:	206-239-1617		Portability:	206-239-1632	
			Special programs:	206-239-1616	
			Project-based Section 8:	206-239-1629	
			Relocation desk:	206-239-1639	
				206-239-1646	
				206-239-1650	
				206-239-1654	
					Barbara Strayer

Please refer to the list below for useful telephone numbers. Most Section 8 caseloads are divided alphabetically by the participant's last name.

