



The BULLETIN

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

1 Find out how to contact PorchLight staff members quickly and easily.

2 Learn how to ensure a problem-free move-in for you and your tenants.

3 Protect your investment by preparing your units for the cool, wet weather to come.

A foundation for the future

New technology will improve customer service and speed up workflow at PorchLight



Dear housing provider,

PorchLight was created almost three years ago and has been evolving steadily ever since with a constant focus on two objectives: improving customer service and maintaining program integrity.

Of course, the two are related. The better we communicate and respond, the easier it is for participants and owners to follow the Section 8 program's many rules. We need well-informed and satisfied customers to operate efficiently and demonstrate to regulators that we are spending taxpayer dollars appropriately.

Many improvements are in place, and more are coming. For example, program information is now available on our Web site, www.sea-pha.org, in English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Somali and Vietnamese. (See page 3 for more on Web resources for landlords.) Visitors to PorchLight will soon have access to a self-directed, computer-based workshop that explains our programs,

requirements and application process. In a few months we'll launch an online application, and publish comprehensive new user manuals for Section 8 participants and landlords. Finally, SHA is investing in new records management technology, called "document imaging," that will transform our internal processes and workflow, resulting in faster, more accurate service.

We are investing in technology and communication efforts despite – but also in response to – cuts in federal appropriations which have triggered SHA budget cuts and layoffs. We believe these investments will increase our efficiency so that we can serve our customers as well or better than before, even with fewer staff.

Some service reduction is inevitable. Our offices are now closed to the public on Mondays, so that our staff can focus on processing applications. We've replaced live telephone operators with an automated attendant system similar to what many businesses have. (See sidebar, at right.) We ask for your patience as we work through the bugs which inevitably come with new systems. Let us know how we are doing, and how we can improve our service.

Kathy Rock



New telephone system at PorchLight

If you've called PorchLight recently, you know that we've implemented a new automated telephone system for directing calls to staff members. Federal budget cuts led to staff reductions which made it impossible for us to continue staffing our call center – but the news isn't all bad. Our new system can actually help you get the information you need faster than before. For useful contact numbers, see page 4. Also, keep in mind these tips for getting the most out of the new system:

SORRY, BUT PRESSING "0" WILL NOT CONNECT YOU TO AN ATTENDANT.

When you call 206-239-1500, you will have to choose one of the options on the recorded menu to speak to an employee. Pressing "0" will not take you to a live attendant.

YOU CAN STILL SPEAK TO A SECTION 8 EMPLOYEE QUICKLY AND EASILY.

To speak to a Section 8 employee, choose option 4 (for the Section 8 department) from the main menu, then choose option 0 from the Section 8 menu.

YOU CAN ALWAYS CONTACT STAFF MEMBERS USING THE DIRECTORY.

The automated directory (option 5 from the main menu) allows you to look up telephone numbers by employee name.

When a tenant moves in

The top 10 things every landlord should know

From the Inspection Team and the New Move-In Team

Like almost everything else in the Section 8 program, the move-in process requires housing providers, tenants and the Seattle Housing Authority to work together closely. For that reason, the Inspection Team and the New Move-In Team at PorchLight have compiled a list of the top 10 things every provider should know about the move-in process. We hope this list will help make your next move-in fast, efficient and problem free!

1. Vouchers must be issued

Participants must be issued vouchers every time they move. This process could take two weeks or longer, so please be patient. Participants are not eligible for an initial inspection unless SHA has issued a voucher, and the move-in process cannot proceed without an inspection.

2. Request for Tenancy Approvals must be submitted

Before SHA can perform an initial inspection, the provider must submit a Request for Tenancy Approval. This form must be filled out completely, because missing information will slow the process down. After you send us the Request for Tenancy Approval, we check the rent and utilities for affordability. We strongly recommend that you talk to participants ahead of time to find out what they can afford. If a family's share of gross rent (contract rent + utility allowance) exceeds 40 percent of the family's income, then the family won't qualify for the unit.

3. Units must be prepared for inspection

To ensure a speedy inspection process, units must be ready for inspection at the scheduled time. Construction or rehabilitation work must be complete. Also, the unit must be unoccupied (unless it is occupied by the tenant for whom the inspection was scheduled). If a unit is not ready for inspection at the scheduled time, SHA inspectors will not inspect it, and the provider will have to submit a new Request for Tenancy Approval form.

4. Tenants should not move in before inspection

Participants should not move into a rental unit before it passes inspection because the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) does not allow Section 8 subsidy to start until after a unit has been inspected and shown to meet HUD's Housing Quality Standards. That means that participants who move in prior to the unit passing inspection are responsible for the total amount of contract rent. This

can result in financial hardship for the participant and inconvenience for the housing provider.

5. Rents must be affordable and rent reasonable

SHA may ask a housing provider to reduce rent if the tenant's share of rent and utilities exceeds 40 percent of the tenant's income. Please note that this is a separate issue from "rent reasonableness," or market value. SHA may also ask that a rent be lowered to a "reasonable" level if the housing authority determines that it is higher than rents for comparable units in the same area.

6. You must sign a lease and a contract

Once a unit has passed inspection, SHA prepares contracts and sends them to the housing provider. Before providers can receive their monthly Housing Assistance Payments, SHA must receive a copy of the signed contract (between the provider and SHA) and a copy of the lease (between the provider and the tenant). The lease must include a list of all family members who plan to occupy the unit, the unit's address and who pays for the unit's utilities. The lease term cannot exceed one full year. For example, a lease starting on August 21, 2003, must end by July 31, 2004.

7. Owners and participants cannot be related

Please note that housing providers and participants in the Section 8 program cannot be related. Rare exceptions can be made in order to accommodate disabilities.

8. Side payments are not allowed

Providers must never collect side payments from participants for utility costs or increased rental amounts. Asking for or accepting a side payment could make you ineligible for the Section 8 program in the future.

9. SHA does not reimburse for deposits or unit damage

The housing authority does not have funds available to help tenants with deposits. Participants are responsible for all deposits. You should collect deposits at the time of move-in, and make sure your lease describes payment plans in detail. SHA also does not reimburse providers for unit damage. It is the provider's responsibility to request payment for unit damage from the tenant.

10. SHA provides Section 8 subsidy in Seattle only

SHA provides Section 8 subsidy for families residing inside Seattle city limits. If you own properties elsewhere, you may need to work with another housing authority.

THE MOVE-IN PROCESS
REQUIRES EVERYONE
TO WORK TOGETHER

News you can use

Preparing for the rainy season

It may be hard to believe while the summer sun is shining, but rain will return to Seattle soon enough. That's why now is the time to prepare your unit for the rainy season. By taking care of a few end-of-summer maintenance items now, you can protect your housing investments and help ensure that your annual inspection passes without a hitch.

START FROM THE TOP DOWN

Check your roof for damage and wear-and-tear, including moss growth. If it is time to repair, replace or even just clean your roof, summertime is the best time to do it. Also consider whether any leaks that appeared during the rainy season last year have been repaired. If you are trying to locate the position of a leak, remember that it is often much higher than where the drip appears, since the water may run along the inside of the roof or soffitt before entering the unit.

While paint and plaster won't stop leaks, applying a fresh coat to areas where drips occurred in the past will enable you to distinguish continuing leaks from old ones that have been repaired.

MAINTAIN YOUR PAINT

It is crucial for owners of pre-1978 housing to properly maintain both interior and exterior paint to limit exposure to lead-based paint. This important subject has been covered in previous *Bulletin* articles; in short, you should fix any peeling, cracking, chipping or otherwise deteriorated paint according to HQS guidelines. (Printed information about repairing deteriorated paint is available by calling 206-239-1664.) You need dry weather to do this type of work properly, so take the time now to look over your property and decide

what needs to be done before it is time for our inspectors to come by. Remember, very often the work needs to be done by trained personnel, so consult our HQS inspection team before you begin. Whether or not lead-based paint is an issue, good paint maintenance will protect your building.

GUTTERS AND DRAINAGE

Gutters are often overlooked, but they play an essential role in dealing with rain. Vegetation can grow in neglected gutters, and those "gutter gardens" block the flow of water. Make sure the gutters are cleaned out and securely connected. Drips from improper gutter maintenance lead to many expensive problems, such as leaks behind walls, rotting wood, mold and deteriorated paint.

Don't forget to think about where the water will go once it flows out of the gutters. Make sure it drains away from the house or into underground drainage pipes that are clear and unobstructed. Consider whether anything needs to be done to waterproof the basement. Dealing with drainage issues is much easier when the ground is dry than when it is saturated with rainwater.

TREES AND PLANTS

Finally, look at the vegetation around your property and trim it if necessary – the rainy season often brings winds that could knock dead branches onto your building. Also, make sure vines haven't grown under shingles, and trim back blackberry bushes if need be.

Remember, addressing these issues now will ease your maintenance work, simplify your property's inspection and help protect your investment.



Get connected!

Helpful Web resources for landlords

Did you know that the PorchLight Housing Center offers several important resources for Section 8 landlords and owners on its Web site? Please visit our support page at: www.sea-pha.org/residentinform/porchlight_support.html. You can also reach this page by going to SHA's home page, www.sea-pha.org, and clicking on the "Downloads" link under "PorchLight." You'll find a long list of useful publications and documents on this page, including:

- Section 8 unit available listings
- Information on how to list your Section 8 unit
- Utility allowances
- Back issues of The Bulletin

E-mail us at porchlight.info@sea-pha.org if you'd like to see anything else on this page, and check back often for new information.



GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a PorchLight staff member about any Section 8-related issue or concern:

- 1) Call 206-239-1500.
- 2) Select option 4 from the main menu.
- 3) Select option 0 from the Section 8 menu.

OCCUPANCY MANAGER

Barbara Strayer 206-239-1620

OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

Special/agency-based: 206-239-1636
 Mod. rehab./project-based: 206-239-1649
 All other programs: 206-239-1619

NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

206-239-1625
 Fax: 206-239-1760

ISSUANCE TEAM

206-239-1662

OWNER LIAISON

If you are an owner and have questions or concerns about Section 8, call:

Sven Koehler 206-239-1674

To report ownership changes: 206-239-1655

To list a unit with Section 8: 206-239-1663

Initial inspections: 206-239-1666

Annual inspections: 206-239-1645

INSPECTION SUPERVISOR

Deborah McCaslin 206-239-1621

INSPECTORS

Bruce Brines 206-239-1689
 Bill Francis 206-239-1631
 Paul Gimmi 206-239-1632
 Nancy Jones 206-239-1616
 Sue Nigg 206-239-1639
 Nancy Shutes 206-239-1646
 Jeff Small 206-239-1669
 Lora Wait-Hoy 206-239-1650
 Mike Yost 206-239-1654

PorchLight telephone: 206-239-1500 | PorchLight fax: 206-239-1770 | PorchLight e-mail: porchlight.info@sea-pha.org

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 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.



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Inside: 
 New telephone numbers
 for 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 (click on "PorchLight"). We look forward to working with you!