

# The BULLETIN

News about the SHA Housing Choice Voucher program

JUNE 2008

Published quarterly for landlords and service providers

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## Voucher program update

### Waiting-list lottery yields list of 4,000



Dear housing provider,

THIS SPRING, as we did in 2006, Seattle Housing Authority created a new waiting list of 4,000 households for the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program. They households selected were chosen at random from all entries in a lottery we conducted by mail.

"We expect those 4,000 households to hold us for at least three years," said Barbara Strayer, manager of the Housing Choice Voucher program. "We received just shy of 12,400 correctly postmarked sign-up forms—well over twice the number we received when we opened the waiting list two years ago." That list, also of 4,000 households, lasted us nearly two years.

To get the word out, we advertised the lottery in newspapers all across the city and on Craigslist, the online classified ad service, and we sent public service announcements to radio and television stations. Thanks to the participation of nonprofit and public agencies, sign-up forms were widely available. The form was downloadable from the SHA website and was made available in large type format and, thanks to the Lighthouse for the Blind, in Braille.

SHA mailed acknowledgments to everybody who sent in a sign-up form on time. People who were selected for a place on the new waiting list were told their position on the list. Separately, the 600 households that drew the lowest numbers—households holding positions No. 1 to 600—were invited to apply for vouchers.

### CHANGES TO APPLICANTS' CRIMINAL HISTORY ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA DISCUSSED, ADOPTED

IN THE LAST ISSUE OF THE BULLETIN, I mentioned that SHA was considering changes to SHA's eligibility criteria for Housing Choice Voucher program applicants with criminal histories—in essence, the adoption of a uniform waiting period of 12 months for applicants who have been jailed for a criminal offense. (SHA will continue to deny vouchers to people who have been convicted of certain drug-related and other serious crimes, and people who have displayed a pattern of violent behavior.) Previously, people who had been convicted of various crimes had to wait for various intervals before we could provide them housing-assistance vouchers.

I invited *Bulletin* readers to come to PorchLight for our March Landlord Workshop to hear about proposed changes and let me know their thoughts.

A number of building owners and managers came to the meeting and heard our reasons for proposing the change—mainly to make vouchers available more equitably to people who need them. I explained that we are not substituting our eligibility standards for yours. Certainly you may continue to devise and enforce eligibility standards of your own.

I presented the pros and cons I heard that night and from other people to SHA's Commissioners, who at their April 21 meeting approved the proposed changes in screening criteria, effective immediately.

Thank you for letting me know your views. I'm always interested in hearing what you have to say about our policies and our programs. Please call me at any time with questions, comments or suggestions.



LISA CIPOLLONE-WOLTERS  
 DIRECTOR OF HOUSING ADVOCACY  
 AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS  
 206-239-1523

# Inspection timelines

## Following the HQS repair schedule saves time and money for all

Housing Choice Voucher program regulations require Seattle Housing Authority to certify that all subsidized units are safe and healthy places to live. Naturally, we believe every landlord shares this goal as well. All through the Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection process, we will work with you to ensure that the standards are met so that we can continue to pay a subsidy for your tenant.

### When does SHA perform inspections?

SHA inspects every subsidized unit at least once a year. Usually this HQS annual inspection falls near the time of the tenant’s annual review, but the timing may not correspond exactly. Your tenant will receive an inspection appointment in the mail at least two weeks in advance, and you will receive a copy of that letter.

At that time, it’s a good idea for you to visit the unit and have a look for yourself at what the inspector will check. (You can find the inspector’s checklist on the SHA website, [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org), by clicking on “Landlords” under the “Housing” heading, then “Inspections” under “Benefits.”) You might also refer to the HUD pamphlet, “A Good Place to Live,” that was provided with your owner’s packet.

### What if a unit fails?

If a housing unit fails its annual inspection, whatever the reason, we will write up a report, a “Summary of Deficiencies,” telling you and the tenant what must be repaired. The date of that report opens a 30-day window during which indicated repairs must be made. If they are not

made, we must “abate” (suspend) the subsidy payments. (See chart below.)

When a unit fails the annual inspection, we schedule a re-inspection within 20 days of the failed inspection to make sure that mandated repairs are completed. Because these required repairs are typically simple, we are usually able to pass the unit at the re-inspection.

Sometimes, however, the inspector returns for the scheduled re-inspection to find that repairs have not been completed. This is frustrating for everyone.

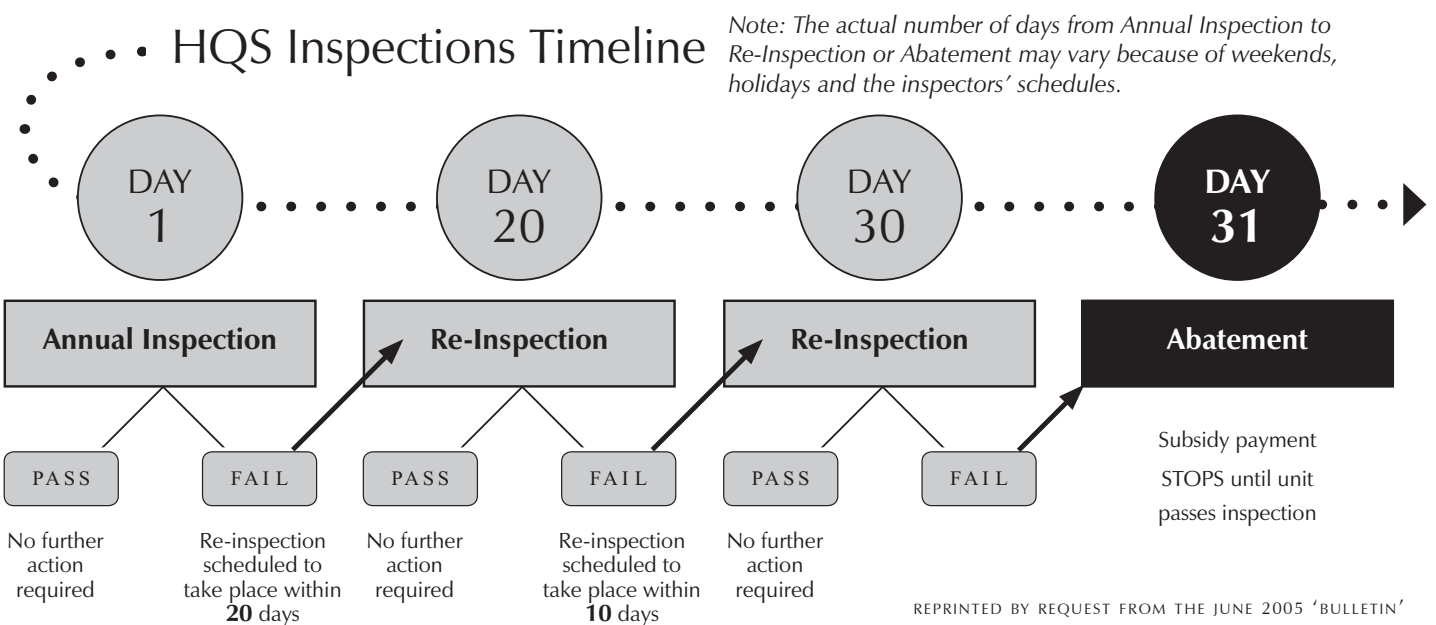
If the repairs haven’t been made, the inspector will schedule a second re-inspection to be conducted, generally, within 10 days. If the unit doesn’t pass that second re-inspection and the inspection process has gone beyond 30 days, SHA must abate the subsidy payments for the unit—that is, stop payments until such time as repairs have been made and confirmed by an inspector.

To prevent this, please confirm that the repairs have been completed before the inspector’s re-inspection.

### What if I need more time to make difficult repairs?

If you know in advance that needed repairs cannot be accomplished in the 20-day repair period, please request more time before the date of the scheduled re-inspection. Depending on the circumstances, we may be able to give you a few more days to complete the repairs before we re-inspect.

While making repairs to the unit, you may discover a deeper problem that requires additional work. In such situations, SHA will typically grant more time providing you call us to discuss the situation. [continued on p. 3]



## Keeping clear of Fair Housing issues

### What a prospective tenant looks like may be misleading

#### **If manager Sam doesn't like the way an applicant looks, can't he just say that the place is already rented?**

No. The Fair Housing laws prohibit a housing provider from stating that a dwelling is not available for rental when in fact it is. Sam must give truthful information to everyone who inquires about a rental.

While Sam's instincts may be good, they are probably not infallible. Many rental managers would prefer that applicants present themselves all dressed up—dressed as though for a job interview. However, remember that some folks must fit in apartment hunting between other obligations such as work and family. The best indicators of who will be a reliable resident are Sam's reasonable rental criteria: income and credit, rental and criminal history.

#### **Kathy Jackson and Tony Lamada, an unmarried couple, are applying at the Chatterton Apartments. The manager asks each of them to complete a rental application and pay a credit-check fee. Is this discriminatory?**

The federal Fair Housing Act does not cover marital status as a protected class, but local Fair Housing ordinances do—including those of the City of Seattle, King County and Washington state. In these jurisdictions, housing providers must treat all applicants and residents similarly, regardless of their marital status.

"Marital status" is defined as applying to people who are married, separated, divorced, engaged, widowed, single or cohabiting (although the Washington state definition of "marital status" doesn't include cohabiting). However, because Kathy and Tony don't have the "community property" status of a married couple, the manager can request that each file a separate application and undergo a separate credit check.

In Seattle and unincorporated King County, once Kathy and Tony become residents, rental management is required to treat them just as it would a married couple with regard to other rental issues.

—Courtesy King County Office of Civil Rights

#### [HQS Inspections timeline, *continued*]

After discussing the scope of repairs with the owner, the HQS inspector or supervisor will determine whether a further extension is warranted, and, if it is, will tell the owner the date by which needed repairs must be completed. We'll schedule a re-inspection for after that date.

Although extensions are determined case by case, we rarely grant an owner an additional 30 days beyond the original re-inspection date. (In practice, extensions beyond 30 days are granted only for exterior work that must be delayed because of inclement weather.)

If you believe that you have grounds for an extension, call the inspector whose name and number is given at the top of the Summary of Deficiencies. You may also call the HQS Supervisor at 206-239-1621.

#### **What happens if I miss the 30-day deadline and I don't receive an extension?**

Unless other arrangements have been made, all repairs must be completed within 30 days of the first inspection. If a unit that has failed re-inspections has not been passed by the 30-day deadline, SHA will abate the unit. Again, this means that we will stop subsidy payments until the repairs are complete.

Owners will not recover lost subsidy from SHA, and in some cases may even owe SHA subsidy that has already been paid on a unit that has failed multiple inspections.

\* \* \*

We're here to assist you—and we're always happy to work with you to bring your unit back into compliance with Housing Quality Standards in a timely manner.

## Landlord

### *Tuesday workshops*

**Tuesday, June 17, 2008**

from 5:30 until 7:00 p.m.

#### **The Housing Choice Voucher program (Section 8) Housing Quality Standards**

An overview of the  
Housing Quality Standards (HQS)

Landlord & tenant responsibility  
for repairing HQS deficiencies

Lead-based paint: Why this is so important,  
what to look for, how to fix it

*Workshops are held the third Tuesday  
of every month, February through November,  
from 5:30 until 7:00 p.m.*

*in the PorchLight Community Room  
907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200, Seattle*

## Inspector's corner

### Cut heat losses now while it's still warm

One of the reasons that units fail inspection during cold months is heat loss through ill-fitting doors and windows. Whatever the cause—poor design, damage, improperly sized or fitted doors or windows—heat escapes from the unit at unacceptable rates, costing tenants and owners money. Increasing energy costs will make this issue particularly urgent this coming winter.

We recommend that property owners inspect and repair all exterior doors and windows soon, before cold weather sets in, to see whether heat loss may be occurring, and why. Without much effort—weatherstripping door jambs, adding door sweeps, making sure glass panes are properly sealed and flush with their frames—you can cut energy costs and avoid damage caused by water intrusion. Check fireplace dampers for proper operation, too.

In some cases—for example, undersized or warped windows—a quick fix will not alleviate the problem, and replacement is indicated. Even though the up-front costs of such replacements can be daunting, preserving or enhancing the integrity of your property will be a benefit—and a tax-deductible benefit at that!

Here are a few suggestions to help cut heat loss:

- Install weatherstripping that isn't easily detached by friction. (However, if you need to use multiple strips, the door or window may need to be replaced.)
- Install door sweeps or taller thresholds to close up gaps at the bottoms of doors to the outside.
- Check to see that window tracks are free of debris so that windows close properly.
- Caulk any gaps around windows.
- Check the caulking on the exterior of single-pane windows; it readily deteriorates but is easy to replace.
- Check the snap-bead on the exterior of insulated windows; it may need to be re-secured or replaced.
- Replace missing interior and exterior window and door trim.
- If a unit has a fireplace, provide a barrier so the opening may be closed off when the fireplace isn't in use.

If you make these and similar simple repairs, your tenant will thank you—and we Section 8 inspectors won't be sending you deficiency letters. You can't lose!

—Lora Wait-Hoy, Inspector



**PorchLight**

Phone: 206-239-1500 | Fax: 206-239-1770

E-mail: porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org | website: [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org)

#### GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a customer service agent about any Housing Choice Voucher program issue, call 206-239-1728 and press '0'

#### TO LIST AVAILABLE UNITS

Call 206-239-1663 or go to [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org) and click on "Section 8 Landlords" under the 'Housing' menu

#### OWNER INFORMATION

**NOTE:** Changes must be submitted in writing  
Fax 206-239-1770, attention Mike Jung.  
Questions? Call Mike at 206-239-1672

#### HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

**MANAGER** Barbara Strayer 206-239-1620

#### OWNER LIAISON

Mike Jung 206-239-1672

#### OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

Tenant-based—  
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1619  
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1636  
Mod. Rehab. & Project-based 206-239-1649

#### NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals—  
contracts and leases  
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1676  
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1635  
New move-ins fax number 206-239-1760  
New move-in team supervisor 206-239-1621

#### INSPECTIONS

Annual inspections & reinspections 206-239-1645  
New move-in inspections—  
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1676  
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1635  
Judy Huertas, HQS supervisor 206-239-1621

#### HQS INSPECTORS

Bill Francis 206-721-1457, ext. 10  
Paul Gimmi 206-239-1632  
Sue Nigg 206-239-1639  
Jonathan Shibuya 206-239-1616  
Jason Shirley 206-239-1646  
Nancy Shutes 206-770-6880  
Lora Wait-Hoy 206-721-1457, ext. 11

## What is PorchLight?

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 Housing Choice Voucher program and applications for public housing.

## Did you know...

...that owners can find support on our website? Visit [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org) today and click on "Landlords" for helpful information and resources.

...that SHA's Impact Property Services provides lead-based paint abatement services? Impact Property Services offers affordable, efficient service to help solve your deteriorated paint problems. We can provide both EPA-certified lead-based paint risk assessors and EPA-certified lead-safe workers, including painters and carpenters. Call Impact Property Services at **206-716-1310**, extension 13.

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