



# The Bulletin

News about the SHA Housing Choice Voucher program · Published quarterly for landlords & service providers

[www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org)

The Bulletin

1

December 2009

## Voucher program update

### Changes coming to inspection schedules & more

IN THE FIRST HALF OF NEXT YEAR, we'll be implementing several initiatives that affect voucher-holders and our landlord partners. Our participation in HUD's "Move to Work" project encourages such initiatives. Among them are these:

#### HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS (HQS) INSPECTIONS

*Regular HQS inspections will be scheduled every other year for participants who have not moved.*

Seattle Housing is developing criteria for subsidized units. When met, these criteria will result in inspections at least every two years instead of every year. Each unit must continue to meet the criteria in order to remain eligible for biennial inspections. Failed inspections, whether the landlord or tenant is responsible for the fail items, will result in a unit's remaining on or returning to an annual inspection cycle until the unit once again meets eligibility criteria. We are not changing our policy on initial (move-in) inspections. Both participants and landlords will continue to have the right to request a complaint inspection if either feels the subsidized unit no longer meets HQS.

*Landlords will be allowed to self-certify their correction of minor Housing Quality Standards fail items.*

Our current policy is to reinspect subsidized units any time HQS deficiencies are identified during an inspection. The policy will be changed to allow for landlords and tenants to jointly self-certify minor HQS fail items that do not pose a safety or health risk. Failure to provide the requested certification by the deadline provided will be treated like a failed reinspection.

#### RECERTIFICATION OF FAMILIES' ELIGIBILITY

Starting in the first half of next year, we will recertify certain households' eligibility for the Housing Choice Voucher program every three years instead of every year. This will apply to families whose household income consists entirely of Social Security or veteran's benefits, Supplemental Security Income, or pensions.

Currently we recertify every participating household every year. Under the new schedule, during the two years that full recertifications are not conducted, Seattle Housing will update qualifying households' records with any changes to Utility Allowances and Voucher Payment Standards, and to apply published cost-of-living adjustments. Affected households will be notified of any subsequent change in their rent amount.

Qualifying households whose circumstances *do* change between recertifications—by an increase or decrease in family size or income, for example—will be required to inform of us such changes soon after they occur, and to request a special review.

For a more complete explanation of these initiatives, visit <http://tinyurl.com/yaum8zj>. To read our 2010 "Move to Work" plan, visit <http://tinyurl.com/yhwbnv>.

We'd like to know what you think. E-mail comments or questions to—

**HousingChoiceVoucherProgram@seattlehousing.org**

or call 206.239.1637, or write to Jodell Speer, data supervisor, at **Seattle Housing Authority, 907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200, Seattle WA 98107-4637.**

\* \* \*

ONCE AGAIN, as another year draws to a close, my staff and I thank you for all you've done and continue to do for our participating families—and for us.

Regards,



*Lisa K. Cipollone-Wolters*

Lisa Cipollone-Wolters

DIRECTOR OF HOUSING ADVOCACY  
& RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS  
206.239.1523

### In this issue

To better serve both the participants to whom we issue vouchers and our landlord partners, we're implementing several innovative changes in 2010 **1**

How to prepare for an inspection: Use this checklist to look at a unit with an inspector's eye **2**

Keeping up on Fair Housing matters **3**

City OKs backyard cottages...Landlord workshops on hold until **Tuesday, February 16** **4**

Inspection coming up? Walk the unit with this checklist in hand, and preview what the inspector will look for.

## What do inspectors want to see?

*From time to time landlords ask us how best to get ready for a Housing Quality Standards inspection. Perhaps the best way is to walk through the unit with this checklist in hand and look carefully at all the things our inspector*

*will be checking. Please note, though, that this is not an exhaustive list of all the items to be inspected. If you have questions about the inspection process or this checklist, call the Inspection Team at 206.239.1621.*



### HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS INSPECTION

## Checklist

#### General

- Address and unit numbers are displayed in a conspicuous place and easily visible.
- Lead paint: All painted surfaces are free from cracks, scaling, chipping, peeling or loose paint. (*This rule applies to units built prior to 1978 when a child under the age of 6 or a pregnant woman will live in the unit*).
- Appliances provided in the lease are working properly and all parts are operational.
- Working smoke detectors are located on each level of the unit (including basements and finished attics) and in common laundry rooms. *Smoke detectors cannot be located in the kitchen area.*

#### Plumbing

- The water supply is adequate.
- Plumbing lines and fixtures are free of serious leaks or defects.
- Hot water tanks have a temperature/pressure relief valve and a discharge line that goes to the exterior of the unit or down to within 6 inches of the floor.
- Fixtures and the waste disposal system work properly.

#### Heating

- Heating devices are permanently installed and operate and vent properly.
- Heating devices maintain an adequate comfort level for the climate.

#### Walls, ceilings & floors

- There are no serious defects – such as severe buckling, bulging or leaning – that threaten the structural safety of the building. No potential exists for structural collapse.
- There are no loose surface materials and no items or components in danger of falling.
- There are no damaged/loose structural members or large holes/cracks that allow significant drafts into the unit.
- There are no defects in the floor materials that may pose a tripping hazard.

#### Electrical

- There is no broken, non-insulated or frayed wiring.
- There are no improper types of wiring connections, such as exposed wire nuts.
- All electrical junction boxes have covers.
- There are no wires lying in or located near standing water or other unsafe places.
- There are no missing or badly cracked cover plates on switches or outlets.
- There are no exposed fuse box connections or open spaces in the electrical panel.
- Circuits are not overloaded.

#### Security

- There are no double-keyed deadbolt locks on doors.
- Exterior doors lock securely.
- Windows that are accessible from the outside and are designed to be openable must lock properly.
- In a bedroom with security bars, there must be at least one window that is openable and allows for escape in case of an emergency.

## Keeping clear of Fair Housing laws

**Q :: *Is it actually against the law to ignore Fair Housing rights or tenants and prospective tenants who seem determined to exercise those rights?***

Indeed it is—it is illegal for anyone to threaten, coerce, intimidate or interfere with anyone exercising a Fair Housing right or assisting others who exercise that right. Moreover, it is illegal to advertise or make any statement that indicates a limitation or preference based on protected class. (This prohibition against discriminatory advertising applies to single-family and owner-occupied housing that is otherwise exempt from the Fair Housing Act.)

**Q :: *If we feel an applicant just won't be a good resident, can we say that a rental is not available when it actually is?***

It is a violation of Fair Housing laws to state that a rental is not available when it actually is. It is best to rely on an objective screening process, not assumptions, to determine if applicants meet your criteria.

Fair housing complaints are more easily avoided when applicants receive clear and consistent information about all housing options, including waiting lists.

Ever heard of “secret shopper” programs, where someone visits retail establishments to evaluate customer service? Fair Housing agencies use a similar testing process to assess specific complaints or to check at random for Fair Housing compliance. Any applicant could be a Fair Housing tester!

**Q :: *If several applicants want the same rental, can we choose who we think is best, based on our experience?***

If several applicants are interested in the same rental, it's best to screen them on a first-come, first-served basis, using objective criteria, then offer the rental to the first qualified applicant. It helps to date and time-stamp applications. Using pre-printed documents helps ensure that information is gathered consistently.

**Q :: *Do Fair Housing laws allow us to request to see photo ID from applicants?***

Some housing providers request identification from applicants for safety reasons or to verify identity. This is OK as long as the request is not based on an applicant's protected class. (For example: Require ID from all applicants, not just from, say, Hispanics.)

Be aware that requiring a specific form of photo ID, such as a driver's license, may have a disproportionately adverse effect on members of certain protected classes, since some people with disabilities or people from other countries may not have driver's licenses, although they may be able to produce another kind of photo ID, of course.

**Q :: *Can we conduct separate credit checks for each adult applicant?***

If a housing provider has a policy of running a joint credit check for married couples, it is OK to ask unmarried couples to file separate applications and to undergo separate credit checks, because they do not have the “community property” status of a married couple.

In the City of Seattle, where “marital status” includes “cohabiting,” management should treat an unmarried couple similarly to married couples once they become residents.

Some people, including gay or lesbian couples and heterosexual couples in which one person is 62 or older, have registered as domestic partners with the Secretary of State. Even so—regardless of their registration status—each may be charged for a separate credit check.

**Q :: *I have a tenant who is disabled and wants to install grab bars near the toilet and the tub in the bathroom of his apartment. I don't think they're needed, and it would be a hassle for me to remove them when he moves. Do I need to let him pay someone to install them?***

Yes, you do. The law states that a housing provider may not “refuse to let a tenant make reasonable modifications to a dwelling or common use areas, at the tenant's expense, if necessary for the tenant to use the housing.” (Where reasonable, the housing provider may permit changes on condition that the tenant agrees to restore the property to its original condition when he or she moves.)

In short, a housing provider must not refuse to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices or services if such accommodations are necessary for a tenant to use the housing.



## Housing Choice Voucher Program

Porchlight Building  
907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200  
Seattle WA 98107-4637

Phone **206.239.1500**  
Fax **206.239.1770**  
E-mail [porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org](mailto:porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org)

[www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org)

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a customer service agent about any Housing Choice Voucher program issue, call **239.1728** and press 'o'

### TO LIST AVAILABLE UNITS

Call **239.1663** or go to [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org) and click on 'Rental Listings' under the 'Landlords' menu

### OWNER INFORMATION

*Note: Changes must be submitted in writing*  
Fax **239.1770**, attention Mike Jung  
*Questions? Call Mike at 239.1672*

### HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM MANAGER

Barbara Strayer **239.1620**

### OWNER LIAISON

Mike Jung **239.1672**

### OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

'Aa' through 'Malerba' **239.1619**  
'Mal' through 'Zz' **239.1636**  
Mod Rehab & Project-based **239.1649**

### NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals—contracts and leases  
'Aa' through 'Lara' **239.1676**  
'Larb' through 'Zz' **239.1635**  
New move-in team supervisor **239.1621**  
New move-ins fax number **239.1760**

### INSPECTIONS

Annual inspections & reinspections **239.1645**  
New move-in inspections—  
'Aa' through 'Lara' **239.1676**  
'Larb' through 'Zz' **239.1635**  
Judy Huertas, HQS supervisor **239.1621**

### HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS INSPECTORS

Bill Francis **721.1457, ext 10**  
Paul Gimmi **239.1632**  
Sue Nigg **239.1639**  
Jonathan Shibuya **239.1616**  
Jason Shirley **239.1646**  
Nancy Shutes **770.6880**  
Lora Wait-Hoy **721.1457, ext 11**

## Inspectors' corner

### City clears way for backyard cottages

On November 2, 2009 the City Council approved backyard cottages. Such detached accessory dwelling units can now be built throughout the city, which will greatly expand the ability to house more people in the City of Seattle.

Of course these backyard cottages will require permits from the building department. Among the requirements are that the lot size be at least 4,000 square feet, the cottage be no larger than 800 square feet, and one of the two dwellings be occupied by the owner for at least six months of every year.

We at Seattle Housing are looking forward to having owners build these units so that we can add them to the list of subsidized properties. By expanding the number of dwellings that are on a property, housing becomes more affordable. And in planning and building these new cottages, energy efficiency, recycling, building green, and accessibility can be incorporated.

The City's "Guide to Building Backyard Cottages" can be found at [www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Backyardcottages/Overview/](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Backyardcottages/Overview/)

—PAUL GIMMI

## Landlord workshops

**Next workshop: Tuesday, February 16, 2010**

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER STAFF conducted nine workshops in 2009. Nearly 100 landlords attended.

Early in the year we hosted presentations by the City of Seattle's Office of Civil Rights and by the Solid Ground Housing Stability Project. In September the Seattle Neighborhood Group reprised an all-day training on keeping crime out of rental housing. In August we presented a workshop at our Housing Operations facility on MLK at Dearborn.

In 2010, to expand the scope of our presentations, we hope to bring in more partner agencies. We will continue to offer workshops on Housing Quality Standards, lease enforcement, and how to attract Section 8 tenants. Find out about the workshops on our website, [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org).

*If you'd like to receive e-mails about upcoming workshops, let us know in an e-mail to Owner Liaison Mike Jung at*

[mjung@seattlehousing.org](mailto:mjung@seattlehousing.org)