



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

A Citizen's Guide to Housing in Detroit

Why Have We Created This Fact Sheet?

Poor housing conditions can be bad for your health. Sometimes people with asthma have “asthma triggers” within their house, such as mold, cockroaches, rats, mice, or dust mites that can make their asthma worse. Many people in Detroit are confused about where to go to get questions about housing issues answered. This Fact Sheet is an attempt to help.

General Housing Information:

The City of Detroit Department of Buildings, Safety, and Engineering (BS&E) has the responsibility to:

1. Follow-up on complaints (usually made by tenants or neighbors).
2. Conduct routine inspections of multi-family homes every two or three years, as required by state law.
3. Conduct inspections when homes are sold, as required by city ordinance. There is an exception to this requirement for homes sold to occupants who have lived in the property for at least a year prior to sale. These inspections are charged to the owner.
4. Operate the Nuisance Abatement Program, which enables families to apply for permission to move into certain types of abandoned homes, make repairs, and eventually obtain title or be paid for repairs to the property.

Owners of residential rental properties must register the property with BS&E and obtain a certificate permitting occupancy before the property may be leased. In additional state law says that when landlords lease residential rental property, they automatically agree to do three things:

1. Keep the property in reasonable repair
2. Keep it fit for residential use
3. Keep it in compliance with all state and local health and safety laws.

These obligations to keep the property in repair apply whether or not the tenant has a written lease and they cannot be waived by the tenant.

General Renter Information:

Whether or not there is a written lease, all Michigan renters have certain basic rights. For example, they have the right to property which is in reasonable repair, fit for residential use and in compliance with all state and local health and safety laws, as indicated above. In addition tenants who complain about repairs are protected by state law from eviction in retaliation for their complaints. Tenants who are low-income can turn to local legal services offices for help if their landlords try to evict them because they complained or withheld rent to make repairs or to get the landlord to make repairs.

Type of Rental Housing	Problem	Who to Contact	Next Steps	Notes
Privately owned	Mold Cockroaches Rats Mice Heat Leaks Lead Water	<p>Housing Division of BS&E: (224-3105) which can coordinate inspections with Plumbing, Heating, and Electrical Divisions of BS&E.</p> <p>The Health Department (876-4516) conducts a visual inspection and can issue a property maintenance ticket and follow-up with the landlord to correct the underlying problems related to vermin, lead, mold or . Water</p>	<p>BS&E will send an inspector after a complaint is made (usually within two weeks of the complaint). If an inspection identifies a repair problem which violates the city code, a notice is sent to the owner of the property advising of the problem and providing a deadline for corrections which is usually 30 days, but may be much shorter, for urgent items.</p> <p>Tenants should walk through their unit with inspectors and point out problems that they may be aware of such as the lack of heat in the winter or a leaking roof when it rains.</p> <p>Contact your local legal aid program for advice and assistance with efforts to get the landlord to make repairs. Local programs serving low-income tenants are the United Community Housing Coalition (313) 963-3298 and the Legal Aid and Defender program (313) 964-4111.</p>	<p>Sometimes landlords respond to complaints about repairs by trying to evict the tenant who complained. It is always best to call BS&E and have the property inspected if the landlord fails to make repairs. A call to BS&E about repairs can support your claims in court and help your case if the landlord tries to evict you. If the landlord tries to evict you, contact your local legal aid providers: the United Community Housing Coalition at (313) 964-4130 or Legal Aid & Defender Association (313) 964-4111.</p> <p>In some cases the Health Department can help with rodent infestation problems. Their Rodent Impact program identifies and addresses problems on the exterior of buildings – in yards and alleys. BS&E handles vermin problems on the inside of buildings (224-3105,6,7). They have program to get rid of fleas and lice. If there is a problem with cockroaches traveling from one home to another, they address this through the Community and Industrial Hygiene Division (876-4516).</p> <p>The Health Department conducts inspections (876-4202) of homes in which children have tested positive for high lead poisoning.</p>
Privately owned	No water	Health Department. (876-3105)	Contact your local legal aid program which may be able to go to court with you to force the landlord to provide water service immediately. These programs serve low-income households and can be reached by calling the United Community Housing Coalition at (313) 963-3298 or the Legal Aid and Defender Program at (313) 964-4111.	<p>If you call the Health Department (876-4516) they may order the building shut down and provide the tenants with a very short notice to vacate the building. The landlord is required to respond to a citation within five days.</p> <p>There are legal aid programs which can intervene to help tenants obtain repairs and prevent the closing of a building. Programs which serve Detroit residents are the Legal Aid and Defender office at 964-4111, the United Community Housing Coalition at 963-3310 and Michigan Legal Services at 964-4130.</p>
Privately Owned	Sewage in Basement	Health Department 876-4516	Same as above	A line may collapse or it may need to be cleaned out.

Type of Rental Housing	Problem	Who to Contact	Next Steps	Notes
Privately Owned	A retaliatory eviction	Contact free legal services providers for help: the United Community Housing Coalition for low-income residents of Detroit (963-3310) or Legal Aid and Defender (LAD) for Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties (964-4111)		A child with asthma will suffer significant damages from asthma triggers such as mold, cockroaches, rats which the court should know about.
Privately Owned	Unsanitary conditions	Health Department 876-4516	Contact free legal services providers for assistance. They may be able to go to court to require the landlord to make repairs. Local programs serving low-income households are the United Community Housing Coalition (Detroit) at 963-3298 or Legal Aid & Defender at (313) 964-4111.	Neighbors or a landlord can complain to the Health Department (876-4516) which may also cite the tenant for certain types of problems. Generally the problem must be corrected within 30 days.
Federally Subsidized Private Owned housing (such as Section 8 vouchers)		Building Safety and Engineering (224-3105,6,7) or the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (226-7109) which has its own inspectors. You may also contact the Section 8 Administrator for the property you are living in. This is the person you report to in the annual recertification process, unless that person is the building manager.) The Section 8 administrator may be in the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) or the local housing commission. If you do not know who to contact, call HUD.	Provide HUD with your address and they can determine which HUD staff person or housing authority is responsible for follow-up. Contact your local legal aid provider if you are low income. These providers include the United Community Housing Coalition (Detroit only) (313) 963-3298 or Legal Aid and Defender (313) 964-4111 (Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties) or Michigan Legal Services (313) 964-4111. These providers may be able to go to court to force the landlord to make repairs, force HUD to suspend subsidies, save subsidies or make sure tenants who are relocated, keep their subsidies.	HUD can suspend or terminate the subsidy to the owner, which is often the largest part of the rent, a very effective method for obtaining compliance.
Public Housing		The local housing commission (in Detroit, 877-8639) or the local HUD office at 226-7109.	If your complaints or other action results in an eviction attempt, seek legal help. Free assistance is available for low-income tenants through the United Community Housing Coalition (963-3310), Michigan Legal Services (964-4130) or Legal Aid and Defender (964-4111)	Note: Federal housing quality standards which are also applicable to these types of housing and in some areas (for example, housing security) are more stringent than local requirements.

Nonpublic	Housing Rehab Help	Visit the Planning and Development website: www.ci.detroit.mi.us/plandev/ The Welcome Center provides info on available block grant or HOME funds.		These funds are generally distributed to various nonprofits which operate home repair or rehabilitation programs. To find out which nonprofit serves your area, contact the City Planning Commission at 224 -3221 or Planning and Development Department at 224-2560.
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