

Tips for Future Tenants

A Guide to Crime Free Rental Housing



How does the property look? How does the neighborhood look? How responsible is the landlord? Your role as a tenant

Just as the merchant depends on the customer for his livelihood, so the landlord depends on the tenant. This places the tenant in a unique and powerful position.

By renting from responsible landlords, and by refusing to rent from landlords who neglect their properties and tolerate illegal activity, tenants convey a clear message that such activity will result in poor rental rates and declining property values.

How Does the Property Look?

Criminals prefer to act anonymously, and look for properties where they won't be seen or identified. Good landlords know this, and make their properties visible to neighbors and police. Taken alone, few of the following crime prevention techniques have a significant impact. Taken together, they deter some criminals from moving onto the property.

Note: *Not every property owner can afford to apply all of these principles, but the presence of several suggests a concerned and responsible landlord:*

Community facilities: Recreational or other facilities encourage neighbors to become acquainted.

Architectural planning: Alcoves and concealed areas where an intruder could gain entry unnoticed are non-existent or minimal. In larger complexes, buildings are set back from the perimeter street to deter the casual passerby from entering the complex area. Off-street parking is provided in a secure place with controlled access.

Lighting: Entrances, walkways, parking lots, perimeters, activity areas, and backyards should be lit. Motion or light-sensitive lighting is especially good. *Consider visiting the property at night, to be sure.*

Fencing: All parking areas adjacent to the perimeter of the complex should have a six-foot fence, or a wrought iron barrier, to deny access from the outside and to prevent parking lots from being

used as shortcuts. Where possible, fence design should allow for visibility.

Landscape: Bushes around windows and doorways are well trimmed, and *do not impair the view of entrances and windows*. Plants are used as barriers to ground floor apartment windows, i.e., thornberry bushes planted under windows, trimmed to just below the windowsill.

Clearly posted address: If the complex consists of several buildings, each building is identified on at least two sides with large building numbers clearly visible to adjacent parking areas day and night.

Permanent map: (For large Complexes) Located at each driveway entrance, this includes a “you are here” point of reference. The maps are clearly visible in all weather and well lit.

Doors / Locks: Every apartment has solid core entrance doors with case-hardened steel single-cylinder deadbolt locks with one inch throw, and corresponding security strike plates. These doors need to be equipped with peepholes.

Security common areas: Laundry rooms and storage areas are locked. Doors, which are otherwise locked, are not propped open. There is control over who enters and leaves the building.

Other things to take note of:

- Sufficient garbage receptacles.
- Floors, ceilings and walls are in good repair.
- The premises are kept safe from fire hazards.
- Working locks are present for all dwelling entrances and keys for locks.
- Ventilating, air conditioning and other facilities or appliances are maintained

How Does the Neighborhood Look?

A clean, well-kept neighborhood is a positive indicator, but appearance may be deceiving. Talk to neighbors to get a sense of what the area is like. Recognize warning signs and features of a neighborhood that suggests criminal activity.

Graffiti: Gangs use graffiti to claim territory, challenge other gangs and intimidate neighborhoods. Taken alone, graffiti may not be significant, but when coupled with other indicators of criminal activity, it might be a warning sign.

Unusual traffic: In a working or middle-class neighborhood, regular visits by people in BMWs, Jaguars, Rolls-Royces and Cadillacs are highly suspect. Heavy biker-type traffic also may be a signal that all is not as it seems.

Fortifications: Homes and apartments with blacked-out windows or other unusual and extraordinary fortifications, such as electrified fences or walls topped with razor wire, are suspicious.

Suspicious people: Several identifiers combined, such as certain types of sport clothing, colors, jewelry, extreme hairstyles, tattoos and the use of hand signals may suggest gang involvement. Also, if you see people exchanging small packets for cash, there is a problem.

Miscellaneous signs: Other signs include heavy condensation on the inside of windows, large packages being moved between vehicles and home, trucks and vans with out-of-state plates, “lookouts,” ammonia or other chemical smells, heavy machinery or exhaust fan noises, or expensive vehicles owned by people otherwise associated with a lower standard of living.

How Responsible is the Landlord?

An irresponsible landlord might say, “the rent is \$450 a month, but if you never call, I’ll only charge \$425.” Responsible landlords take the applicant screening process very seriously. Don’t be insulted by detailed questions on the application. If the landlord is scrutinizing your application, you will have peace of mind in knowing that other renters are being screened equally as well, and that the risk of illegal activity occurring in the area is reduced.

Effective landlords are active managers, committed to providing honest tenants with good housing and keeping dishonest tenants out. Effective landlords will:

- Thoroughly screen each applicant using credit checks, previous landlords and other references.
- Apply rental criteria equally to every applicant.
- Insist upon a complete application, filled in onsite or during an application interview.
- Require two pieces of good identification, i.e., drivers license, military ID, etc.
- Document everything in writing.
- Conduct periodic inspections of the property.
- Encourage community gatherings so neighbors get to know each other.

Effective landlords will have rental agreement provisions like the following:

- No subleasing.
- Only those listed on the rental agreement are permitted to occupy the unit.
- No drug or criminal activity will be tolerated.
- Tenants will not unduly disturb the neighbors.
- Visitors may stay no longer than ____ days, and only ____ with the landlord’s permission.

Effective landlords live up to their responsibilities. They will ensure that:

- Roofs, walls, doors, and windows are water and weather-proofed.
- There are not vermin, rodents, rubbish, or garbage.
- Heat, electrical lighting and wiring, plumbing, water supply, safe drinking water, and sewer connections are in good working condition.

Your Role as a Tenant

Now that you’ve scrutinized your future rental unit, neighborhood and landlord, you may wish to take a look at yourself. As a tenant, you are required:

- To use various parts of the premise (including electrical, plumbing, sanitary, heating, ventilating, etc.) in a responsible manner considering their intended purposes and design.
- To keep the premises as clean and safe as the condition of the premises permits.

- To keep plumbing fixtures clean.
- Not to destroy, deface, damage, impair or remove any part of the premises or permit another person to do so.
- Not to disturb the neighbor's peaceful enjoyment of the premises.

Failure to meet your responsibilities as a tenant will mar your rental history and, in the future, make you an unattractive applicant to a responsible landlord. But don't stop here – do more than the minimum: become involved in your neighborhood, watch out for your neighbors, assist your landlord in keeping your rental "safe by design", and report suspicious activity to the police.

Finally, view your relationship with your landlord, neighbors, and police as a *partnership*. Every one of us are allies, not adversaries, and we constitute a force more powerful than crime itself, as long as we are committed to that partnership and the responsibilities it entails.

*

This information is intended as a guideline to help tenants identify landlords and properties that are least inviting to criminals. By being selective, you reward the crime prevention efforts of good landlords, and reward yourself with safe, crime-free and healthy environment.

This information is provided to you by the Walla Walla Police Department as part of the CFRH program. If you would like to know more about this program please contact:

Officer Tim Bennett
Crime Free Rental Housing Coordinator
Walla Walla Police Department
54 E. Moore Street
(509) 524-4381