

UNSAFE HOUSING PROTOCOL

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Adequate housing is an important determinant of the health status of children and adults. Housing quality affects levels of exposure to indoor pollutants, safety of food and water, levels of sanitation, exposures to physical hazards and injury and general quality of life.

BACKGROUND

Housing may be unsafe for a variety of reasons. These include: dangerous construction, inadequate ventilation, inadequate heating, dangerous or inadequately maintained services, overcrowding (too many residents for the space), location in a hazardous area (e.g. flood zones, contaminated land, etc.), or the presence of dangerous contaminants (e.g. lead or formaldehyde) in the building materials. Living in inadequate/unsafe housing can result in increased health risks such as respiratory illness and physical injury. Possible definitions of unsafe/unhealthy housing include housing that:

- Is physically unsound and likely to be dangerous to its residents because of poor construction or inadequately maintained services (e.g. electricity); or
- Is located in physically hazardous areas e.g. flood zone, earthquake risk or sited on land contaminated by chemical wastes, radioactivity; or
- Provides serious risk of exposures to indoor air pollution or exposure to pathogens; or
- Provides inadequate shelter due to poor insulation, inadequate roofing or lack of basic amenities such as cooking or heating capabilities.

With few exceptions, tenants are legally entitled to rental property that is in good repair and that meets basic structural, health and safety standards-both when they originally rent the unit and throughout the rental term. Depending on the state and severity of the problem, tenants have the right to withhold rent, pay for repairs and deduct the cost from rent, move out, and/or pursue other legal remedies if the landlord violates their legal responsibilities to provide safe and livable premises.

ASSESSMENT

To avoid living in an unsafe rental unit:

- Thoroughly inspect the property before moving in
- Be sure the lease or rental agreement spells out landlord responsibilities for repair and maintenance
- Try to get information from other tenants on how the landlord responds to tenant complaints and how repairs and maintenance are handled

- Check on state and local housing laws especially those on rent withholding and repair and deduct remedies.
- If the client is currently living in unsafe housing, suggest the following resources:
 - King County Housing Repair Programs provide housing repair services to low-income homeowners and mobile home owners in King County (only outside Seattle city limits).
If eligible for services, a Housing Repair Program staff person will conduct an assessment. Home owner loans and grants are available as well as home access modification grants for renters. King County Housing Authority provides housing assistance through several programs outside the city of Seattle. For weatherization services for homeowners and renters outside Seattle, call 206-214-1240. For information about other programs, call 206-574-1100.
 - Renton Housing Authority provides subsidized housing in Renton for low-income families. Call 425-226-1850.
 - Seattle Housing Authority provides housing assistance through 6 programs in the city of Seattle. Some programs may have long waiting lists. Eligible people may qualify for more than one program. Call 206-684-0244 for information.
 - Habitat for Humanity is a resource for people living in overcrowded, run-down, defective or unsafe housing and who currently pay over 30% of gross income on housing expenses. To be eligible, a family's gross income must fall between 25% and 60% of King County's median income. (The average monthly payment for a Habitat for Humanity House is \$600-\$900.) The family's debt must be no more than 40% of its gross income and applicant families must be credit worthy. Each family selected to purchase a home from Habitat for Humanity must complete a minimum of 500 hours of sweat equity (250 hours for families with 1 adult). To contact Habitat for Humanity: Seattle-206-957-6914, Tukwila-206-292-5240, and Redmond-425-869-6007.
 - Contact Solid Ground (206-694-6700) for tenant services programs.
 - Contact the Community Information Line (211) for legal resource information.

EDUCATIONAL MESSAGES

- Adequate and safe housing is important to the health of both children and adults.
- Housing may be unsafe due to: dangerous construction, inadequate ventilation and/or heating, dangerous or inadequately maintained services, overcrowding, hazardous location or the presence of dangerous contaminants.
- Inspect any property before moving to be sure it is safe to live in.
- If renting, be sure the lease or rental agreement describes the landlord responsibilities for repair and maintenance. Find out how repairs and maintenance are handled.
- Contact appropriate resources if housing is unsafe and/or repairs are needed.

ACTIONS

CHW ACTIONS	PARTICIPANT ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While conducting the Home Environmental Assessment, note any problems that make the residence unsafe e.g. poor construction or maintenance, hazardous location, exposure to indoor air pollution, poor insulation, roofing problems or lack of cooking or heating capabilities. • Provide the participant with resource information based on the housing problem and the location of the residence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspect any property before moving in to be sure it is safe. • If housing is unsafe, work with the CHW to access resources needed to resolve the problem.

FOLLOW-UP VISITS

If relocation is needed:

STEPS TO ADDRESS RELOCATION ASSISTANCE

1. Assess the environmental housing problem.
2. Write letter to landlord and educate patient on landlord/tenant rights as well as documentation of attempted notification to landlord. Supply patient with our template for work order requests.
3. If repair is not possible under the auspices of this pilot project due to the extent of the problem (such as, excessive time needed to repair, cost exceeding the allotted repair budget or other relevant issue), determine who has authority over the property.
4. Refer client to Environmental Health Inspector at Public Health- Seattle & King County. An environmental health inspector may provide assistance in writing a letter detailing specific environmental and/or structural issues found in the client's home and what options are available and/or recommended for creating a better housing environment. This letter may be co-signed by Jim Krieger, MD, as a means to verify the health implications of the patient's environment. The letter can be given to the tenant directly to then give to the manager. The environmental health inspector may also help by contacting the owner/manager in person as needed to review and follow-up on the above issues.
5. Assist the client in contacting the manager/owner by helping them write a letter to the manager/owner, recommending:
 - Replacement of the damaged materials not covered by this program

If that is not possible, then request assistance with relocation expenses such as packing and moving, transfer fees for utilities, phone and garbage, and refund of the cleaning deposit when the damage is not related to client neglect or mishandling.

6. If client has Section 8, recommend that they contact the International District Housing Alliance (IDHA) housing search specialist for help in finding new housing.
 - Hours for consultation services have been contracted for under the Healthy Homes and HUD grants and are available for any participants.
7. If the client has AFDC, there is a \$1500 housing assistance program. Assess for client having used this service during the past year. If this program has been used, provide client with community resources such as church benevolent funds.
8. If the client lives in a Housing Authority housing units, refer them to Resident Services Director.

SUPPLIES

- Education Handouts

REFERRALS