



Let your building's maintenance staff do its job

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One of the joys of rental life is that you don't have to worry about having to replace a hot water tank. If you have a leaky faucet, all you have to do is call the building's maintenance department.

"Whether you pay \$500 or \$1,500 a month rent, tenants get all of the amenities of their apartment building and a staff that comes in each and every day to make sure tenants enjoy living there," said Joy Anzalone, executive vice president and chief operating officer for Burton Carol Management, which is responsible for a number of apartment complexes in Northeast Ohio.

Most tenants appreciate not having to be responsible for major maintenance of their apartment unit. But occasionally, someone wants to make changes or tackle a problem. For safety reasons, Anzalone said residents are never encouraged to work with electricity or anything else that could be potentially dangerous.

"Some tenants like decorating and want to paint a wall or change a light," said Anzalone. "That's fine, but we suggest they buy the lighting fixture they want and let maintenance install it. Renters are usually happy with that arrangement. The important thing is to ask permission to make a change and let our trained maintenance staff do it. Sometimes people make changes that we don't know about. But we do annual inspections, and we'll make sure that there is nothing done in the apartment that may cause harm to the tenants, neighbors or building."

Anzalone said that she can't speak for all management companies, but her company "believes in same-day maintenance service or no later than 24 hours" to correct a problem. No heat is an emergency; no air conditioning is a 24-hour response.

"This past hot summer tested all of the maintenance staff in Cleveland," said Anzalone. "The key is to make sure that your maintenance staff communicates with tenants. If a part was ordered five days ago and didn't arrive, you have to let the tenant know. You don't want the tenant sitting there waiting for the maintenance staff because they expected somebody that day."

Anzalone urged tenants to notify maintenance staff right away if there is even a small leak in the bathroom plumbing or a strange noise from a ceiling fan. It is generally less expensive and easier to fix a small problem rather than a big one, said Anzalone.

What about tipping the maintenance staff? Anzalone's company discourages it because it doesn't want employees doing special favors for someone who "pays extra" for any service. Employees are compensated. She doesn't want renters who can't afford to tip to feel as if they will not get equal service. Showing your appreciation at the holidays can be acceptable if the entire maintenance staff shares the recognition, she said.

"Cleveland has a lot of apartments that are 20 years or older. Old is not bad when it is maintained. The apartments look and function like new because of great maintenance staffs," said Anzalone. "We don't believe in band-aiding a job. We fix it or replace it. This is our real estate property and our tenants' homes."

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