

Dave Poletti & Associates Presents

The Seattle Landlord Report

A Monthly Publication to Keep Our Clients Informed

WHAT IS A REAL RENTAL EMERGENCY?

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It is important to understand what a rental emergency is. Depending on whose perspective it is, whether it can be owner, tenant, vendor, or property manager, it can mean different things when it happens.

The definition found on Wikipedia is

An emergency is a situation that poses an immediate risk to health, life, property, or environment. Most emergencies require urgent intervention to prevent a worsening of the situation, although in some situations, mitigation may not be possible and agencies may only be able to offer palliative care for the aftermath.

While some emergencies are self evident (such as a natural disaster that threatens many lives), many smaller incidents require the subjective opinion of an observer (or affected party) in order to decide whether it qualifies as an emergency.

The precise definition of an emergency, the agencies involved and the procedures used, vary by jurisdiction, and this is usually set by the government, whose

agencies (emergency services) are responsible for emergency planning and management.

This is a precise definition, but when it comes to handling "emergencies" in rental property, **the first step is to determine if there is a true emergency.** Some emergencies are obvious when they happen, such as fire, water flowing through the property, loss of heat in cold conditions, major gas leak, etc. For these circumstances, it is important to take immediate action and simply handle the situation as quickly as possible. There are emergencies but there are solutions.

However, there are times when a tenant has a different "perspective" on what is an emergency. When this happens, the Property Manager has to consider the tenant's feelings but at the same time, recognize that it is not an emergency. The following maintenance problem is a good example of this.

Janice is a good tenant. One thing that Janice rarely does is cook. She does use the stove and microwave, but not the oven. However, she invited eighteen people for Thanksgiving and planned the full turkey dinner, including baking pies. The day before the holiday, she started working on the pies. When she

turned on the oven, it did not work. As you can imagine, she panicked, calling the Property Management office, screeching that she had an emergency.

When the Property Manager finally worked through the hysteria, she determined it was not an emergency but a necessary repair. However, Janice was not to be soothed. The Property Manager immediately called a technician to see if they could get

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A Day on the Hill – Property Management Legislation

On January 27th, King County NARPM participated in the annual Legislative Day – Day on the Hill. The entire day was devoted to meeting legislators to discuss issues important to the rental housing industry. Over 150 people from housing associations throughout the state were in attendance including Leeann Ghiglione from Dave Poletti & Associates. This constitutes the strongest showing ever for this event.

Some of the issues discussed were the right to access public records for tenant screening, opposition to rent control and concerns about abatement of property without notification of criminal activity.

After the briefing, landlords and property managers were able to meet either with their legislators individually, or attend the group meetings where legislators came in to address everyone at one time. Legislators like to meet with their constituents and it makes it easy when there is more than 1 person to discuss the issues. Plus it makes a bigger impact.

Legislators who made an appearance included: Rep. Ross Hunter, Rep. Jay Rodne, Sen. Steve Hobbs, Rep. Fred Finn, Rep. Larry Springer, Sen. Rodney Tom, Rep. Jamie Pederson and Rep. Troy Kelley. By meeting together it shows Legislators we have a strong united voice.



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out immediately. They would try but could not promise. Apparently, this is quite a common situation just before Thanksgiving. Eventually, the Property Manager also worked through the situation with Janice and they came up with a plan for the Thanksgiving dinner. It took some time, but Janice finally came to the realization that it was not a true emergency. The best news is that the vendor worked late and did manage to fix the oven.

This may seem a silly example to you but there are many similar situations like this with tenants. They can feel frightened, threatened, angry, frustrated, and more. They can be difficult tenants or just had a bad day. What is important is to determine quickly what the situation is. If it is a true emergency, we want to act on it right away. If it is not, we want to diffuse the situation, but still handle the repair in a timely manner.

As a property owner, you may also feel angry and frustrated when a true emergency occurs. It will mean expense and potential problems with the tenant. We do our best to counsel tenants on what is a true emergency, but it is not always easy. As your property management company, **we will do everything we can to minimize the problems** and find the solutions, whether it is a true emergency or just a routine maintenance problem.