

Mainely Landlords

For landlords with tenants who have Housing Choice Vouchers from MaineHousing

Fall 2012



HUD contracts for inspections of 1,000 HCV rental units

HUD, as part of its ongoing effort to assure Maine's Section 8 rental units meet federal Housing Quality Standards, is inspecting an additional 1,000 rental units across the state in August, September, and October. HUD will be using private contractors to conduct this latest round of inspections. An average of 150 units a week will be inspected beginning August 6 and will continue through October. Landlords and tenants will receive notification of an inspection by MaineHousing two weeks before the inspection.

The inspection of 1,000 units follows an intensive schedule of inspections in June. HUD sent its own inspectors to Maine and inspected nearly 700 rental units.

We sincerely appreciate your patience and cooperation as we assist HUD in completing this inspection process. Many of your units have been inspected multiple times this year. While inconvenient, these inspections have had benefits—much of the serious deficiencies in the quality of the rental housing stock have been corrected, largely due to your diligence and investment. This means that future inspections should be less burdensome and failures less egregious.

We in the HCV program have clarified our standards in order to make the inspections more predictable and consistent. Our inspectors are trained in a consistent application of the quality standards. We also are improving our inspections process to assist you in meeting the Housing Quality Standards. One example is that now inspectors are carrying spare light bulbs and will insert one into an empty socket in order to pass the unit.

Questions about Housing Quality Standards?

The goal of the Housing Choice Voucher program is to provide “decent, safe, and sanitary” housing at an affordable cost to low-income families. To accomplish this, program regulations set forth basic housing quality standards (HQS) which all units must meet before assistance can be paid on behalf of a family and at least annually throughout the term of the assisted tenancy. HQS defines “standard housing” and establishes the minimum criteria necessary for the health and safety of program participants.

To assist in preparing for your inspection and understanding the standards for inspection go to: http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/hqs.

HUD proposes revised Fair Market Rents

Each year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development issues proposed Fair Market Rents. This year, there are proposed rent increases in several regions in Maine. The final Fair Market Rents take effect on October 1. You can review the proposed rents at <http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/fmr.html>.

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Contact us:

HCV Program line:
624-5789 or
1-866-357-4853

Toll-free inspections phone line:
1-855-887-6045

A beneficial service to landlords is the new toll-free line for inspections. Do you have questions about the inspections process, a scheduled inspection or the results of a recent inspection? Feel free to call our new toll-free phone number for inspections services.

www.mainehousing.org



Meet our HCV inspections team

You may have already met one or more of our inspectors as a result of the intensive inspections schedule underway. All of our inspectors carry identification to verify their status as MaineHousing inspectors. Please ask to see their ID badges if you have any questions or concerns.

All of our inspectors are HQS-certified and several hold additional certifications in environmental remediation, lead paint remediation, and more.

Manager:

Michael Baran manages the Inspections Services division. He formerly worked for 22 years for the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. Mike has extensive experience in and understanding of multiple HUD programs including Section 8, CDBG, HOME, Neighborhood Stabilization, and Disaster Recovery.

Inspectors:

Kim Brown has worked for MaineHousing for six years in the HCV program as a program officer. She became a full-time inspector this year and has coordinated our inspections process with the Office of the Inspector General and accompanied them during their inspections.

Shawn Roy started with the HCV program as a program officer with responsibility for the Family Self-Sufficiency program and the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program. He began his responsibilities as an inspector in December.

Vincent Noonan is a long-time inspector formerly with Dirigo Housing. He came to MaineHousing six years ago and conducted tenant-based housing inspections for Asset Management. He

began his responsibilities with the HCV program in March.

Ken Salvucci joined the HCV

Inspections division as an inspector on loan from the Energy and Housing Services department where he had worked for two years. Prior to joining MaineHousing Ken owned and operated a construction company.

Ed Stevens most recently was employed by Penquis CAP as the project manager for its weatherization program. Previously, he worked for KVCAP as the real estate and development manager and manager of affordable housing services. He has experience in developing new single-family and multi-family housing projects.

Jim Fusari has many years of housing experience working for Preservation Management as a property manager for a 104-unit apartment complex. He also has worked for Shalom House as a housing specialist.

Kevin Bernier was employed previously by Penquis Community Action Agency where he headed up its for-profit energy program. He has experience in housing inspections and extensive training in codes and inspections.

Colin Walls is also a former Penquis Community Action Agency employee where he was responsible for weatherization inspections and energy audits.

Robert Seavey comes to us from Penquis Community Action Agency where he was the project manager for the lead paint control program. He previously worked for Bangor Hydro and has experience owning and operating a building construction company.

Program Assistants:

Vanessa Taylor has a range of experience in the social services and building/engineering services fields.

Karen Arbour has more than 15 years of experience providing executive assistance in the legal and telecommunications field.

Questions about leases?

Here are some of the common questions we receive from landlords about lease agreements:

1. Do I need approval from MaineHousing to increase the number of adults in the rental unit?
2. Can I restrict pets?
3. What about smoking policies?
4. How can I cover tenant-caused damages to the unit?

A strong lease is crucial in protecting your rights as an owner and ensuring that tenants understand their obligations to you as a landlord. MaineHousing does have to approve any new adults added to the household, so if a tenant asks you to add anyone, please make sure this information is communicated to the MaineHousing Program Officer.

You have control over your pet and smoking policies, and clearly stating them in the lease can assist in preventing future misunderstandings between you and the tenant. Another area that is crucial to outline in the lease is what the security deposit covers (if you are requesting one), and in what condition the unit must be left in order for the tenant to recoup their deposit.

There are additional resources for landlords on the MaineHousing web site. Go to: <http://www.mainehousing.org/programs-services/rental/landlords>.

“Why is a missing light bulb or globe considered a life safety hazard?”

Uncovered fluorescent lights, incandescent light fixtures without bulbs, or light fixtures hanging by wiring are all dangerous. Fluorescent lights have energized wiring, starters, and ballasts under their protective covers. If the light's cover is not properly replaced, these hazards are exposed. When an incandescent bulb is removed and not replaced, the open socket presents a hazard if it remains energized; and therefore, it is best to leave the burnt bulb in the socket to cover the electrical contact until the bulb is replaced.

“What are GFCIs and can I ground them?”

There are two types of outlets: Two-pronged and three-pronged. Three-pronged outlets have an additional hole for a ground wire and are called “grounded outlets.” Two-pronged outlets are “ungrounded.”

- Ungrounded, two-pronged: Usually found in older construction (pre-1975), which is an acceptable type of outlet under an HQS inspection as long as the outlet is in proper operating condition. An owner does not need to upgrade the electrical system (convert two-prong to three-prong) to pass an HQS inspection. To test it: Plug in an appliance and see if it works.
- Grounded, three-pronged: Found in newer housing and acceptable under HQS as long as the outlets are grounded and are in proper operating condition. Newer units constructed with a three-wire

electrical system include a hot, neutral, and ground wire. So, how do you tell if it's in proper operating condition?

Three things: the outlet is properly grounded; a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI)

protects the three-pronged, ungrounded outlet; and the outlet complies with the applicable state or local building or inspection code.



Outlet with GFCI

The inspector will use an outlet tester to determine whether the outlet is properly grounded.

So, upon reading this, you may ask, “Wait a minute! Many of my appliances are three-pronged and not two-pronged. How do I test two-pronged outlets?” Only two-pronged appliances can test two-pronged outlets. But your question brings up an interesting point ... inspectors need to check whether two-pronged outlets have been improperly “upgraded” to three-pronged ones, namely without the necessary rewiring that adds a ground wire.

Three-pronged, grounded-type outlets should not be substituted for ungrounded

outlets unless: 1) a ground wire is connected to the outlet or 2) a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) protects the outlet, according to HUD. Installing a new ground wire may require a licensed electrician to install a new wire into a circuit breaker box. HUD says a more cost-effective method is to protect the outlet with a GFCI, which provides protection to the outlet. If it senses a difference in current flow between the hot and the neutral terminals, it shuts off the flow of the current to the outlet.

So, should I ground a GFCI? Yes ... and no.

According to HUD, if an outlet contains a GFCI, it must work as designed for the inspector to consider it in proper operating condition—grounded or not grounded. Yes, it can be in proper operating condition even if it's not grounded. You can tell that a GFCI is in proper operating condition if you can press the “test” button and it trips the circuit and shuts off power through the receptacle.

For more guidance related to electrical outlets, please see HUD's notice at the following link: http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=DOC_9010.pdf.

List your lead-free rentals

The most common cause of childhood lead poisoning in Maine is dust from lead paint. More than half of Maine homes may have lead paint. Even housing with lead-based paint can be safe for families if maintained in a lead-safe way. Children less than six years old are most likely to be poisoned by lead. Lead can cause learning disabilities and behavioral problems that last a lifetime.

MaineHousingSearch.org

You work hard to make your rental properties safe & healthy for your tenants. Now you can advertise your lead-based paint free, lead-safe or lead-maintained units to thousands of prospective renters for **FREE**.
List your properties on MaineHousingSearch.org today.

It's FREE! Go to **MaineHousingSearch.org** to list online or call toll-free **(877) 428-8844**.

Does my property qualify for lead-safe status?
Find details at MaineHousingSearch.org or call Beth Chase at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection at (207) 592-6157.

MaineHousingSearch.org is a service provided by the Maine State Housing Authority and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine, which supports smoke-free housing listings on the registry, and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, which supports the new lead status feature.

Common inspection “fails”

Recently, letters outlining some of the more common “fails” from unit inspections were sent to landlords and tenants. Common causes for failure include:

- Electrical hazards, such as overloaded extension cords, outlets that aren’t properly grounded, cracked or missing switch plate or outlet covers, exposed wiring, uncovered junction boxes, and light fixtures without globes or bulbs;
- Missing smoke or carbon monoxide detectors, or detectors with missing or dead batteries;
- Wobbly railings or loose stair treads;
- Chipping or peeling paint in pre-1978 units with small children;
- Blocked egress windows or fire escapes;
- Missing or out-of-date maintenance tags on furnaces or boilers;
- Garbage or debris in the unit, common areas, or yard;
- Leaky faucets or other plumbing issues.

MaineHousing does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, age, physical or mental disability, or familial status in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs, and activities. MaineHousing will provide appropriate communication auxiliary aids and services upon sufficient notice. MaineHousing will also provide this document in alternative formats upon sufficient notice. MaineHousing has designated the following person responsible for coordinating compliance with applicable federal and state nondiscrimination requirements and addressing grievances: Louise Patenaude, Maine State Housing Authority, 353 Water Street, Augusta, Maine 04330-4633, Telephone Number 1-800-452-4668 (voice in state only), 207-626-4600 (voice), 1-800-452-4603 (TTY in state only), or 207-623-2985 (TTY).



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