

HOUSTON'S DANGEROUS APARTMENT EPIDEMIC

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A CITY OF RENTERS

HOUSTON HAS THE THIRD HIGHEST NUMBER OF OCCUPIED APARTMENTS (320,000) IN THE COUNTRY.

RENTERS LIVE IN 55% OF HOUSTON'S OCCUPIED HOUSING STOCK.

THE SCOPE OF THE EPIDEMIC



LAX REGULATIONS

40% of Houston's apartments were built between 1960 and 1979 when building safety regulations were especially lax. As of 2014, approximately **400,000 Houstonians (more than 20% of the city's population) lived in these older apartments.**



COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Before Harvey, **274 apartment complexes** were in poor or unsound condition according to appraisal district records. These units are concentrated heavily in neighborhoods with high percentages of black and Hispanic residents.



UNSAFE BUILDINGS

Harvey amplified the scale and severity of the City's preexisting unsafe building conditions, with close to **43,000 apartment units** in Houston damaged by the storm, according to reports in the local news media.



CRIMES

Apartments with high levels of crime are pervasive, with a disproportionate impact on persons of color. At one apartment complex in Southeast Houston, **284 major crimes** were reported in a single year.

HOW MANY CLASS C AND D APARTMENTS?



a. 427,000 renter-occupied units – 54.6 percent of the city's occupied housing stock



b. Class C apartment are older with deferred maintenance issues that are at risk of deteriorating into Class D apartments without investments in major maintenance. Class C apartments constitute 32 percent of complexes with approximately 200,172 units



e. Additionally, according to one study, 43,000 apartment units were damaged by hurricane Harvey producing issues such as mold, bug infestations and deterioration of structural support creating safety issues.

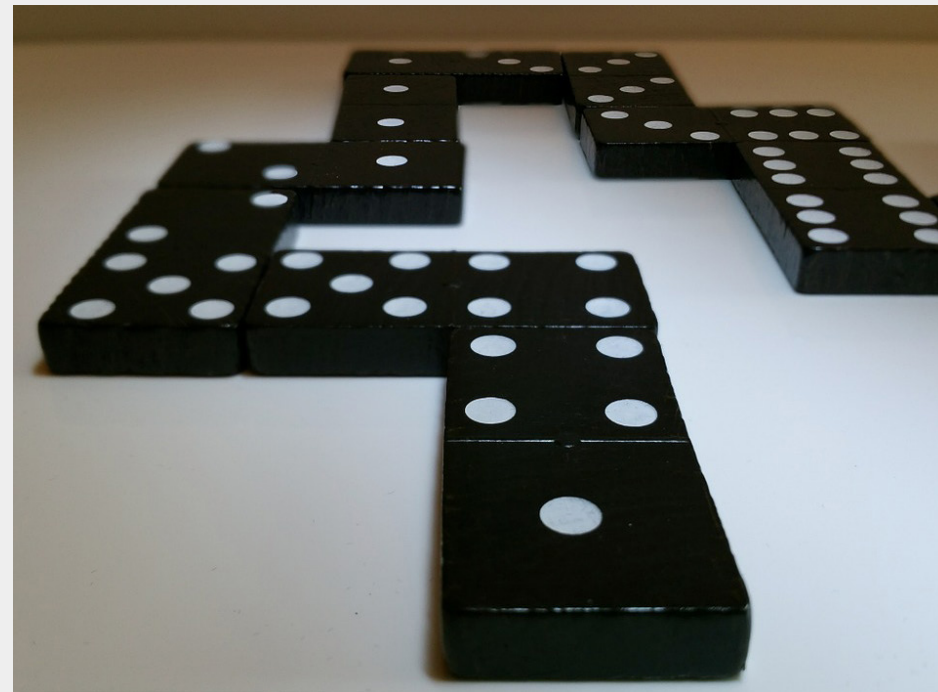


c. Class D apartments are aged properties in the poorest condition with excessive deferred maintenance. Class D apartments constituted 9.7 percent of complexes with approximately 47,333 units housing 100,000 tenants or more.



d. According to the appraisal district's tax records, 274 multifamily complexes in the City limits were in poor or unsound condition.

AN OPERATIONS NIGHTMARE



9 city units spread across 5 separate departments administer apartment safety programs in Houston.



Houston employs only 2 inspectors for the entire city to respond to tenant complaints about interior code violations impacting health, including mold, bug and rodent infestations, and sewage overflows.



The Multi-Family Habitability Division's programmatic inspections **do not cover interior health** and safety issues.

EXAMPLE: AT WESLEY SQUARE APARTMENTS, TENANTS MADE MORE THAN 73 REPORTS TO 311 FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES, INCLUDING A CEILING CAVING IN, BED BUG INFESTATIONS, AND MOLD, NONE OF WHICH WERE COVERED BY THE DIVISION'S PROGRAMMATIC INSPECTION OF THE PROPERTY.



The Multi-Family Habitability Division's policy is to wait **6 months** to follow up on safety issues identified through the Division's apartment inspection program and 311 calls.

311—IS ANYONE THERE?

AN INVESTIGATION OF TENANTS' 311 REPORTS AT 10 APARTMENT COMPLEXES IN HOUSTON SHOWS MULTIPLE, SYSTEMIC FAILURES THAT ALLOW DANGEROUS CONDITIONS TO PERSIST:



Tenant calls to 311 are frequently misrouted to the wrong department resulting in long delays to address major safety hazards.

EXAMPLE: AT TIERWESTER VILLAGE, MULTIPLE TENANTS CALLED 311 TO REPORT SEWAGE OVERFLOWS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THEIR UNITS. THE CALLS BOUNCED BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS OVER SEVERAL WEEKS, AND THE CITY DID NOT INSPECT THE PROPERTY UNTIL 5 WEEKS AFTER THE FIRST 311 CALLS CAME IN.



The Multi-Family Habitability Division automatically closes cases from 311 calls after reaching a tenant's voicemail or busy signal.

EXAMPLE: AT CRYSTAL SPRINGS APARTMENTS, THE DIVISION RESPONDED TO A TENANT'S 311 REPORT OF A ROOF CAVING IN BY LEAVING A VOICEMAIL MESSAGE AND CLOSING THE CASE. NO ADDITIONAL ACTION WAS TAKEN.



Tenant reports to 311 of major health and safety issues are rarely inspected.

EXAMPLE: TENANTS MADE 58 CALLS TO 311 REPORTING HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES AT WESLEY SQUARE APARTMENTS THAT WERE REFERRED TO THE MULTI-FAMILY HABITABILITY DIVISION. NONE OF THE CALLS RESULTED IN AN INSPECTION.



Tenants' 311 calls routed to the Health Department are often closed without any record of the health issues' resolution.

EXAMPLE: TENANTS AT TIERWESTER VILLAGE CALLED 311 TO REPORT WATER LEAKS FROM THE CEILING AND MOLD, BUT THE CITY HAS NO RECORD OF THE ISSUES BEING RESOLVED. THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT REPORTED THAT STAFF "MAY HAVE NEVER GOTTEN AROUND" TO FOLLOWING UP OF THE TENANTS' REPORTS.



Spanish-speaking callers reporting safety issues face longer response times.

The City often fails to act on 311 calls when there is a pending landlord-tenant dispute or when the caller is not a lease-holding tenant, even concerned caretakers of elderly and disabled tenants.

EXAMPLE: THE CITY REFUSED TO TAKE A REPORT OF BED BUGS FROM THE SON OF AN ELDERLY LEASE-HOLDER WITH DEMENTIA BECAUSE THE SON WAS NOT LISTED ON THE LEASE.

APARTMENT INSPECTION

REFORM (A.I.R.)



THE CITY SHALL REFORM APARTMENT INSPECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES TO IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY OF THE PROCESS AND ENSURE HOUSTON'S RENTAL UNITS ARE UP TO A STANDARD THAT PROVIDES QUALITY LIVING CONDITIONS AND REDUCES CRIME TO PROVIDE A HEALTHY AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL CURRENT AND FUTURE HOUSTONIANS.

Such reform should provide protections and resources for tenants to address dangerous apartments, increase resident and community access to apartment safety information and engage the community to assist with addressing problem rental properties, improve apartment inspection and registration programs, consolidate oversight and enforcement of health and safety issues at apartment complexes, strengthen the City's enforcement of health and safety standards at apartment complexes, especially against repeat offenders, increase the number of properties in the Remedial Action Program, adopt cost recovery policies for problem rental properties, improve enforcement of violations, work

with the Houston Housing Authority to strengthen property standards for complexes renting to tenants with Housing Choice Vouchers and to amend the fee schedule, existing ordinances, minimal property and adopt ordinances or property standards as necessary for the implementation of the reform measures.

THE A.I.R. DOCUMENT SHALL INCLUDE BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS DOCUMENT TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES OUTLINED.

CONDUCT INSPECTIONS

A. PWE HAS 10 INSPECTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENFORCING THE CITY'S MULTI-FAMILY HABITABILITY CODE AND ENSURING THAT APARTMENT BUILDINGS REGISTER WITH THE CITY.

B. HHD HAS TWO SEPARATE BUREAUS WITHING THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION THAT PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF APARTMENT COMPLEXES. THE BUREAU ONLY HAS TWO INVESTIGATORS TO ENFORCE INDOOR HEALTH ISSUES.

C. HFD LIFE SAFETY BUREAU APARTMENT TEAM, WHICH IS A PART OF THE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THAT APARTMENT COMPLEXES COMPLY WITH THE COH FIRE SAFETY LAWS. THE APARTMENT TEAM WHICH ALSO OVERSEES FIRE SAFETY AT MOTELS AND HOTELS HAS 14 INSPECTORS. THIS TEAMS GOAL IS TO IS FOR EACH INSPECTOR TO CONDUCT 4 INSPECTIONS OF APARTMENTS PER MONTH (ALONG WITH 4 INSPECTIONS OF MOTELS PER MONTH) FOR A TOTAL OF 672 APARTMENT COMPLEXES, WHICH COMES OUT TO EACH COMPLEX BEING INSPECTED ABOUT ONCE EVERY 6 YEARS.

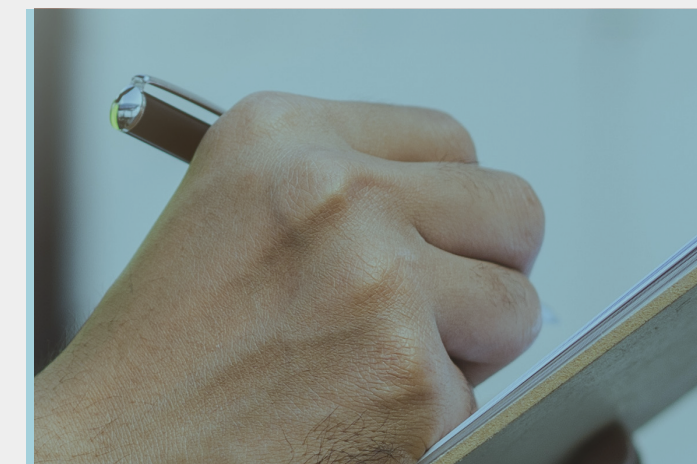
D. HPD OPERATES SEVERAL CRIME PREVENTIONS PROGRAMS AT APARTMENT COMPLEXES, INCLUDING PROGRAMS THAT TARGET HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE VIOLATIONS AS WELL AS OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF COMPLEXES.



i. Differential Response Teams (DRT's) utilize a community-based policing approach to address quality of life issues in communities, including the poor and unsafe physical condition of apartment complexes. DRTs are often involved in bringing code enforcement actions against apartment owners for multifamily habitability issues. Each department has a DRT ranging from 1-15 officers, depending on the size of the station.



ii. Apartment Enforcement Unit has 8 police officers who oversee implementation of a Houston ordinance governing excessive crime at apartments. The excessive crime ordinance was adopted in 2006 and requires all multifamily rental properties in the city with at least 10 units to register with HPD. 2 officers with the unit oversee the registration. This unit also operates the City's remedial action program, which 2 police officers are assigned to. This unit also operates the Blue Star Program.



iii. Forfeiture Abatement Support Team, which is a part of the Narcotics Unit works in conjunction with the Houston Legal Department to address high crime properties, including apartment complexes, utilizing nuisance abatement tools.

iv. Major Offenders Division oversees the investigation of several specialized areas – predominantly felony offenses – that fall outside other divisions. The scope over code violations at apartment complexes includes environmental crimes such as sewage spills, chemical spills, and illegal dumping.

E. HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT CONDUCTS ANNUAL INSPECTIONS OF MULTIFAMILY PROPERTIES WITH 8 OR MORE UNITS THAT HAVE RECEIVED FEDERAL OR CITY FUNDING THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT. THE APARTMENTS ARE INSPECTED FOR COMPLIANCE WITH ONE OF TWO SETS OF HOUSING STANDARDS, DEPENDING ON WHEN THE CITY ENTERED INTO A CONTRACT WITH THE PROPERTY OWNER.

CONSOLIDATION

- CONSOLIDATING INSPECTION DUTIES WHERE FEASIBLE AMONGST ALL DIVISIONS INTO ONE GROUP. THIS WILL REQUIRE CROSS-TRAINING.
- CONSOLIDATE SPECIALIZE DUTIES WITHIN DEPARTMENTS, SUCH AS MERGING HPD'S F.A.S.T. DUTIES THAT PERTAIN TO APARTMENTS INTO HPD'S APARTMENT ENFORCEMENT UNIT
- INCREASE THE NUMBER OF HEALTH INSPECTORS TO ENSURE THEY CAN ADDRESS 311 COMPLAINTS IN A TIMELY MANNER AND DO FOLLOW-UP INSPECTIONS, AS NECESSARY.

APARTMENT COMPLEX

ACCOUNTABILITY

DEVELOP A RISK ASSESSMENT PROFILE FOR MULTIFAMILY PROPERTIES AND CONDUCT MORE FREQUENT AND COMPREHENSIVE INSPECTIONS.

- COLLABORATE AND SHARE APARTMENT INSPECTION FINDINGS ACROSS ALL DEPARTMENTS TO ENSURE PROPER MONITORING OF THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF APARTMENT COMPLEXES. THIS MAY REQUIRE CREATING A NEW SHARED DATABASE SYSTEM.
- CREATING A REPEAT OFFENDER PROGRAM THAT INCLUDES FINES. THEN SUPPLEMENT IT WITH A HIGH IMPACT LANDLORD PROGRAM THAT WOULD IDENTIFY LANDLORDS THAT OWN MULTIPLE CLASS D PROPERTIES AND TARGET THEM FOR MORE COMPREHENSIVE INSPECTIONS AND ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS.

A.I.R. SUSTAINABILITY

PLAN

- WE PROPOSE AN ANNUAL REGISTRATION FEE OF \$250. THIS FEE IS EXEMPT FOR ANY LANDLORDS THAT MAINTAIN THEIR PROPERTIES BASED ON A BLUE STAR STANDARD OR ITS EQUIVALENT. THOSE APARTMENT OWNERS THAT MEET THE BLUE STAR STANDARD WILL HAVE AN INSPECTION DONE EVERY THREE YEARS. ANY OWNERS THAT DO NOT FALL WITHIN THIS CATEGORY WILL HAVE AN ANNUAL INSPECTION AND A \$250 FEE WILL BE INCURRED.
- ENFORCING THE CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY REQUIREMENTS ON ALL PROPERTIES WILL GENERATE ADDITIONAL REVENUE.
- APARTMENT COMPLEXES THAT DO NOT MAINTAIN THE CITY'S HABITABILITY CODE WILL INCUR FINES AND FEES.



PRIOR APARTMENT INSPECTION

LEGISLATION

A. ORDINANCE 2006-1124: THE EXCESSIVE CRIME ORDINANCE

Update existing ordinances, program guidelines, fee schedule and various other policies as necessary for reform changes

B. CHAPTER 10 ARTICLE IV MULTIFAMILY HABITABILITY CODE.

C. HCDD MINIMAL PROPERTY STANDARDS

D. BLUE STAR CERTIFICATION

Encourage 4% tax credit seekers to pursue Blue Star certification

