



# **HANDLING HABITABILITY ISSUES IN RICHMOND**

City of Richmond Rent Program

Edward Argenal

Rent Program Services Analyst

March 26, 2025



# AGENDA

---



OVERVIEW OF THE  
RENT ORDINANCE



LAWS, POLICY AND  
PROCEDURE



TENANT PETITIONS  
TO REDUCE THE  
RENT



IMPLIED  
WARRANTY OF  
HABITABILITY



EVICCTIONS



RELOCATION  
PAYMENTS

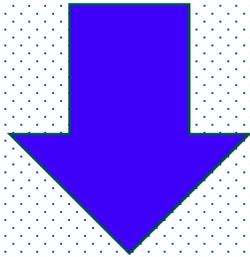


LANDLORD ENTRY  
TO MAKE REPAIRS

# WHICH PROPERTIES ARE COVERED BY THE RICHMOND RENT ORDINANCE?

## FULLY COVERED UNITS:

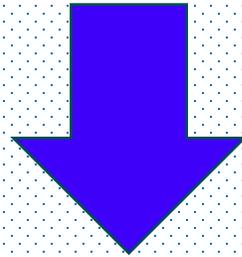
Rent Control and Just Cause for Eviction Protections



- Multi-Unit properties built on or before February 1, 1995

## PARTIALLY COVERED UNITS:

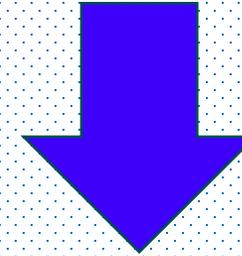
No Rent Control, only Just Cause for Eviction Protections



- Subsidized units, including Section 8 tenancies
- Properties with one dwelling unit
- “New Construction” or post Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1995, construction.

## FULLY EXEMPT UNITS:

Not under Rent Control and no Just Cause for Eviction Protections



- Where a landlord and tenant share a kitchen and bathroom
- Single-Family Homes where a permitted ADU was added & the main house is owner occupied
- Retirement homes

# The Maximum Allowable Rent (MAR)

It is the maximum rent that can be charged for a “**Fully Rent Controlled Unit.**”

Can be adjusted downwards if there is a decrease in habitability or reduction in space or services

Equals the **Base Rent + Sum of all Annual General Adjustments (AGA) + Individual Rent Adjustments** (Approved through the petition process).

The Base Rent includes the initial rent paid by the Tenant plus any services that are included in the initial rent (water, garbage, appliances provided, etc.)

# Laws and Policies Defining Habitability

---

Implied  
Warranty of  
Habitability

CA Civil  
Code 1941.1

CA Civil  
Code 1941.2

Health and  
Safety Code  
17920

# Implied Warranty of Habitability



- Applies to every residential lease in California.
- The Implied Warranty of Habitability means that the act of offering a lease to a tenant *implies* that the Landlord is offering a habitable unit that meets basic health and safety standards. These basic standards are defined through several laws and in multiple jurisdictions.

# State Law Governing Habitability

**State Civil Code 1941.1** and **Health and Safety Code 17920.3** are two of the CA State laws that require and define the standards for habitability that a Landlord must maintain.

Local Housing Code (Richmond Municipal Code) mirrors State habitability standards but provides clarity and detail about those habitability standards (e.g. minimum temperature required to provide “hot water”).

# Civil Code Section 1941.1

**Civil Code 1941.1 lists the following examples of what is considered a habitable unit and is therefore the Landlord's responsibility to maintain:**

- ✓ **Effective waterproofing/weather protection of roof and exterior walls, including unbroken windows and doors.**
- ✓ **Plumbing facilities in good working order, including hot and cold running water, connected to a sewage disposal system.**
- ✓ **Gas facilities in good working order.**
- ✓ **Heating facilities in good working order.**
- ✓ **An electrical system, including lighting, wiring and equipment, in good working order.**
- ✓ **Clean and sanitary buildings, grounds and appurtenances (for example, a garden or a detached garage) which are free from debris, filth, rubbish, garbage, rodents and vermin.**
- ✓ **Adequate trash receptacles in good repair.**
- ✓ **Floors, stairways and railings in good repair.**
- ✓ **A working toilet, wash basin, and bathtub or shower. The toilet and bathtub/shower must be in a room that is ventilated, and that allows for privacy.**
- ✓ **A kitchen with a sink, which cannot be made of an absorbent material (for example, wood).**
- ✓ **Natural lighting in every room through windows or skylights. Unless there is a ventilation fan, the windows must be able to open at least halfway.**
- ✓ **Safe fire or emergency exits leading to a street or hallway. Stairs, hallways and exits must be kept litter free. Storage areas, garages, and basements must be kept free of combustible materials.**
- ✓ **Operable deadbolt locks on the main entry doors of rental units, and operable locking or security devices on windows.**
- ✓ **Working smoke detectors in all units of multi-unit buildings, such as duplexes and apartment complexes. Apartment complexes also must have smoke detectors in common stairwells.**
  
- ✓ **\*Also see Health and Safety Code 17920.3**

# Tenant's Responsibilities

## Civil Code Section 1941.2

A tenant must take reasonable care of the rented property and common areas, such as hallways. This means that the tenant must keep those areas in good condition. A tenant must also repair all damage that he or she causes, or that is caused by the tenants' guests, children or pets. California Civil Code section 1941.2 requires the tenant to do live and the following:

- ✓ Keep the premises "as clean and sanitary as the condition of the premises permits."
- ✓ Use and operate gas, electrical and plumbing fixtures properly. (Examples of improper use include overloading electrical outlets, flushing large foreign objects down the toilet, and allowing any gas, electrical, or plumbing fixture to become filthy.)
- ✓ Dispose of trash and garbage in a clean and sanitary manner.
- ✓ Not destroy, damage, or deface the premises, or allow anyone else to do so.
- ✓ Not remove any part of the structure, dwelling unit, facilities, equipment or appurtenances, or allow anyone else to do so.
- ✓ Use the premises as a place to live and use the rooms for their proper purposes. For example, the bedroom must be used as a bedroom and not as a kitchen.
- ✓ Notify the landlord when deadbolt locks and window locks or security devices do not operate properly.

A collage of hands wearing work gloves holding various tools like a power drill, saw, hammer, and wrench, with a house icon in the center.

# How a Tenant Can Address a Habitability Issue

# Steps for Addressing Habitability Problems



Contact the Rent Program to become informed about your rights under the Richmond Fair Rent, Just Cause For Eviction, Home Owner Protection Ordinance and applicable state law.



Document the problem

1. Write letter(s) of complaint (keep signed copies) and consider proof of mailing
2. Take photos or videos of the problem and attach them to the letter(s) of complaint

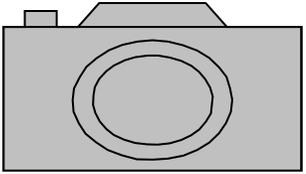


If a landlord is nonresponsive to complaints, the tenant may schedule a Housing Inspection with the City of Richmond. Tenants who reside in subsidized housing, such as Section 8, must contact the Housing Authority to schedule an inspection.

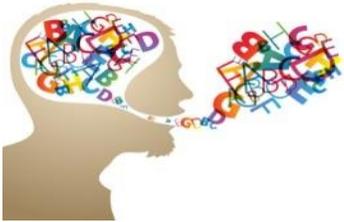


If the property is fully covered under rent control, a tenant has the option to file a petition for rent reduction. If the property is fully or partially covered, the tenant has the option to request mediation services. Petitions for rent reduction and requests for mediation services are available through the Rent Program.

# Tips for Documenting Habitability Problems



Tenants are advised to write letters or emails of habitability complaint(s) to the landlord and or property manager. Attaching photos or videos to the letter or email is an effective way to document the problem. It is a good idea to keep copies for your own records.



If you are engaged in verbal communication with a Landlord, it is recommended that you summarize the conversation in writing to avoid unnecessary disputes or misunderstandings.



If you are engaged in verbal communication with a Landlord, it is recommended that you summarize the conversation in writing to avoid unnecessary disputes or misunderstandings.

Using a chronological approach to memorializing the problems is important in framing the narrative.



Be mindful that anything you write may become part of a court action wherein you would be required to appear before a judge to explain your complaint. In other words, you may hurt your credibility if your letter or email makes you seem unreasonable or abusive in tone.

# Requesting a Housing Inspection



To request a housing inspection, contact the City of Richmond Residential Rental Inspection Program at 510-690-8260 or [richmondrrip@ci.richmond.ca.us](mailto:richmondrrip@ci.richmond.ca.us). **Note: The Landlord's contact information must be provided at the time the request is made.**

**Section 8 Tenants:** If Section 8 tenants believe their landlord is violating the terms of the Housing Assistance Payment Contract or lease, please contact the Contra Costa County Housing Authority at 925-957-7023.



Upon determination that an inspection is needed, generally, it may take up to 10 days after making the request for the inspection to take place.



The inspector will notify the Landlord if code violations are found, and the Landlord may face fees or fines for failure to correct the violations.

A hand holding a wooden gavel over a wooden table with papers. The gavel is positioned as if about to strike the table. The background is blurred, showing a person in a white shirt. The text "Tenant Petitions to Reduce the Rent" is overlaid in the center.

# **Tenant Petitions to Reduce the Rent**

# Criteria for Filing a Petition To Reduce Rent Due to Habitability Problems

A Tenant can petition to reduce their rent if the following criteria is met:

- **The Landlord has been informed about the problems**
- **There is a decrease habitability or a reduction of space or services**
- **Tenant resides in a fully covered rental unit (where both rent control and eviction protections apply).**

Tenants who live in partially covered or fully-exempt properties cannot file petitions to reduce the rent because these properties are not regulated or controlled by the Rent Board.

# Filing a Petition May Lead to a Hearing



After filing a petition for habitability problems, the Landlord and Tenant are required to attend a hearing, where both parties can present their evidence. Alternatively, if the served party has no objections, then the Hearing Examiner may opt to issue an Administrative Decision, without holding a hearing.



The Rent Program Hearing Examiner reviews evidence submitted in the petition and the opposing party's objections and hears testimony from both sides. A decision to award a rent refund and an order to reduce the rent generally occurs several weeks after the hearing is held. Both parties may appeal the Hearing Examiner's decision within 35 days of the date of the decision. If the decision is appealed, the 5-member Rent Board acts as an appellate court and issues a final decision, which may be also appealed to Superior Court.

# RENT

**Limitations on a Landlord's Ability to Raise or Collect Rent  
because of  
Habitability Issues**

# Habitability Problems May Lead to the Landlord Being Unable to Raise the Rent

A Hearing Examiner may deny a Landlord from taking a future vacancy rent increase if there is evidence that there was intent by the Landlord to force the Tenant by not fixing things.

Non-compliance with a Hearing Examiners order can result in denial of AGA increases.

Under Rent Board regulations, if a Tenant moves out of a Controlled Rental Unit due to unabated habitability problems, the Rent Board may consider this a non-voluntary vacancy. If a Tenant leaves as a result of the unabated habitability problems the rent level of the next Tenant remains at the same level that the Tenant who was forced to vacate was paying.

If the Rent Board Hearing Examiner orders a Landlord to make repairs, reduce the rent, or refund rent overcharges and the Landlord fails to comply with the Hearing Examiners decision, the Hearing Examiner may deny Annual General Adjustment Increases until the Landlord comes into compliance.

# California Law and a Tenant's Right to Withhold Rent Due to Habitability Problems

California Civil Code Section 1942.4 prevents a landlord from demanding rent, collecting rent, issuing a notice of a rent increase, or issuing a 3-day notice to pay rent or quit where all of these four factors exist:

- The Rental unit substantially lacks any habitable characteristic as listed in Civil Code 1941.1 or violates Health and Safety Code 17920.10 or is deemed and declared substandard as explained in Health and Safety Code Section 17920.3, because the conditions listed in that section exist to the extent that endangers the life, limb, health, property, safety, or welfare of the public or the occupants.
- A Public Officer or employee who is responsible for the enforcement of any housing law (this could include RHA employees who do HQS inspections), after inspecting the Rental Unit, notifies the Landlord or his/her agent in writing to abate the nuisance or repair the substandard condition.
- The condition continues to exist without abatement for 35 days beyond the date of written notice provided by the public officer or employee responsible for enforcing housing laws.
- The complained of condition was not caused by the Tenant.

A landlord who violates this law is liable to the tenant for actual damages and special (statutory) damage of not less than \$100.00 and not more than \$5,000.00.

# **Breach of the Lease Agreement**

A hand holding a silver pen is positioned over a document on a desk. The background is softly blurred, showing a pair of glasses and a white mug. The overall scene suggests a professional or legal setting.

# Lease Breaking Law

## CA Civil Code 1951.2

- ❖ If a tenant “breaks” a lease they are liable for unpaid rent, but only if:  
The landlord attempts to mitigate unpaid rent damages by making a reasonable effort to re-rent the unit.
- ❖ In other words, if a tenant breaks a lease, the landlord cannot make the tenant pay for unpaid rent unless the landlord can show that they made a reasonable effort to re-rent and were still unable to find a replacement/new tenant.
- ❖ Even if a tenant breaks a lease, a landlord may not charge the tenant for ALL of the rent still due on the contract. For example, if a tenant breaks a lease six months in, a landlord cannot charge the tenant for the remaining six months of rent. A landlord may only charge rent as it becomes due, during which, they must continue to make a reasonable effort to re-rent the unit.

# Habitability Problems and Breach of the Lease

Significant habitability problems may allow a Tenant to vacate without notice.

If a Tenant vacates a rental unit due to habitability problems, the law may allow them to end their tenancy without giving 30-days' written notice. If a tenant vacates the property and is sued by the Landlord for unpaid rent, ultimately a Tenant's right to vacate without providing notice, would be decided in court.

Significant habitability problems may allow a Tenant to vacate the rental unit without being liable for unpaid rent remaining on the lease.

If a Tenant vacates their rental unit due to significant habitability problems, the tenant may be allowed by law to vacate the unit without being liable for unpaid rent remaining on the fixed term lease. Since the landlord (impliedly) promises to comply with the implied warranty of habitability when they sign a lease agreement, the tenant may argue that the landlord actually breached the lease agreement by failing to follow the implied warranty of habitability. However, ultimately, whether a Tenant or a landlord is liable for breaking a lease would be decided in court\*.

**\*Because each lease breaking situation is different, it is recommended that landlords consult with an attorney prior to taking any action to breaking the lease.**

# Relocation Payments



# Habitability Problems and Temporary Relocation Payments

## Temporary Relocation Assistance

Under the Relocation Ordinance (R.M.C. §11.102 et. seq.), if habitability problems are such that repairs and abatement require the Tenant to temporarily relocate, the Landlord must pay for the temporary relocation.

## Permanent Relocation Assistance

A Landlord and Tenant may agree to a permanent relocation payment if, after the temporarily relocation period is over, the Tenant does not want to move back into the unit and instead finds alternative permanent housing.

# 2025 Temporary Relocation Payments Amounts

| Per Diem Description | Amount                         | Term (a)              |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Hotel or Motel       | \$185.86                       | Per day per household |
| Meal Expenses        | \$37.42                        | Per day per person    |
| Laundry              | \$1.25                         | Per day per household |
| Pet Accommodations   | Cat - \$36.17<br>Dog - \$64.86 | Per day per animal    |

Applicable amounts shall be paid on a weekly basis, calculated on a daily basis, at a minimum. Alternatively, the Landlord may provide comparable housing located in Richmond. In such case, the Landlord shall provide per diem payments until the Tenant and their possessions have been moved into the comparable Rental Unit. (RMC Section 11.102.030(g))

The Landlord shall immediately make Temporary Relocation Payments to the Tenant . (Relocation Ordinance, Section 11.102.030(a)(1))

# 2025 Permanent Relocation Payments Amounts

| Maximum Cap per Unit Type (a) (b) | Base Amount | Qualified Tenant/Household Amount (c) |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| Studio                            | \$4,355.81  | \$4,923.76                            |
| 1 Bedroom                         | \$6,725.81  | \$7,749.89                            |
| 2+ Bedroom                        | \$9,159.42  | \$10,504.08                           |

(a) If a Rental Unit is occupied by one Tenant then the entire per unit Relocation Payment shall be paid to the Tenant. If more than one Tenant occupies the Rental Unit, the total amount of the Relocation Payments shall be paid on a pro-rata share to each Eligible Tenant.

(b) The Relocation Payments will be calculated on a per Rental Unit basis, distributed on a per Tenant basis, and includes a maximum cap per Rental Unit.

(c) A “Qualified Tenant Household” is any household that includes at least one Tenant that is a Senior Citizen, Disabled, or has at least one minor dependent child as defined in R.M.C 11.102.020(a) and (l).

# 2025 Permanent Relocation Payments Amounts

**Withdrawal from Rental Market or Substantial Repairs (R.M.C. 11.100.050(a)(7)) OR Due to a Governmental Agency Order the Tenant to Vacate the Rental Unit, or Other Condition Described in Richmond Municipal Code Section 11.102.030(c)**

| Maximum Cap per Unit Type (a) (b) | Base Amount | Qualified Tenant/Household Amount (c) |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| Studio                            | \$8,775.23  | \$10,056.28                           |
| 1 Bedroom                         | \$13,451.61 | \$15,501.04                           |
| 2+ Bedroom                        | \$18,255.22 | \$21,009.41                           |

(a) If a Rental Unit is occupied by one Tenant then the entire per unit Relocation Payment shall be paid to the Tenant. If more than one Tenant occupies the Rental Unit, the total amount of the Relocation Payments shall be paid on a pro-rata share to each Eligible Tenant.

(b) The Relocation Payments will be calculated on a per Rental Unit basis, distributed on a per Tenant basis, and includes a maximum cap per Rental Unit.

(c) A “Qualified Tenant Household” is any household that includes at least one Tenant that is a Senior Citizen, Disabled, or has at least one minor dependent child as defined in R.M.C 11.102.020(a) and (l).

# Evictions

## EVICTIION NOTICE

Date:

Tenant:

Ad

# Just Cause for Eviction

RMC 11.100.050

Residential tenants can only be evicted for one of the following “Just Causes” (a written notice must state the reason):

- **Failure to Pay Rent**
- **Breach of Lease**
- **Nuisance**
- **Failure to Give Access**
- **Temporarily Vacate in Order to Undertake Substantial Repairs\***
- **Owner Move-In\***
- **Withdrawal from Rental Market\***
- **Temporary Tenancy**

\*Relocation Payment required – See Relocation Ordinance established by the City Council (RMC 11.102)

# Nuisance

Landlords may proceed with an eviction if a tenant's behavior creates a "nuisance." Nuisance may lead to habitability problems. Nuisance may include, but is not limited to:

- Behavior that results in substantial danger to the health and safety of tenants and neighbors
- Behavior that prevents other tenants or neighbors from quiet enjoyment of living in their property such as:
  - continuous loud music/noise
  - Repeated or continuous fighting, yelling, barking dogs
  - foul odors from the garbage receptacle area
- Engaging in illegal activities (ex., drug dealing).
- Abandoned vehicles, equipment, appliances, unsafe fences, structures, or foliage
- Overcrowding a room with occupants
- Smoking
- Damaging property

**Tenants are required to comply with the provisions set forth in Civil Code Section 1941.2 (To be discussed in Slide 10).**

# Written Warning Notice Requirements

## RMC 11.100.050(d)

Must be served PRIOR to a notice of termination of tenancy if the Just Cause for Eviction is:

- **Breach of Lease**
  - **Nuisance**
  - **Failure to Give Access**
- 
- Must provide a “reasonable period” of no less than five (5) days to cure or correct the violation prior to serving a notice of termination of tenancy
  - Must state that failure to cure may result in eviction
  - Must inform Tenant of their right to request a reasonable accommodation (For example, a Tenant may require additional time to cure if disabled)
  - Shall include the contact number of the Rent Program
  - Shall include instructions for compliance
  - Shall include information necessary to determine the date, time, place, witnesses present and other circumstances.

# Habitability Problems and Evictions

Habitability problems can be used as a defense to an eviction lawsuit. Retaliatory evictions are illegal.

If a Rent Controlled Unit is deteriorating and the owner is attempting to terminate the tenancy, a Tenant may use the habitability problem(s) as a defense to an eviction lawsuit. An attempt to evict a Tenant on the basis of a Tenant submitting a request for a housing inspection is generally considered retaliatory and, therefore, unlawful.

Chronological documentation is key to protecting Tenancy

It is important to chronologically document your response and action taken for habitability problems. The documentation may show a pattern or effort on the part of the Landlord to illegally force a Tenant to move or “**constructively evict**” the tenant.

Landlord must be in compliance with Rent Ordinance to evict.

If a Hearing Examiner issues a decision to refund or reduce the rent until a habitability problem is fixed, and the Landlord fails to issue the refund, reduce the rent and/or fix the problem, a Tenant may use the Landlord’s non-compliance as a defense to an eviction lawsuit.



# Landlord Entry to Make Repairs

# Habitability Problems and Lawful Landlord Entry to Make Repairs

## 24 HOUR NOTICE TO ENTER REQUIRED

If a Tenant informs the Landlord about a habitability problem, the Landlord has an obligation to make the necessary repairs. The Landlord, or their agent(s), have a right to enter the rental unit to make repairs after giving the Tenant at least 24-hours' written notice.

## Abuse of the Right to Enter Can Lead to the Rent Being Frozen or Penalties

A Landlord may not abuse the right to enter and must follow the specific rules laid out in Civil Code 1954. Abuse of the right to enter can lead to the Landlord being unable to reset the rent to market if the Tenant is forced to vacate as a result (i.e. "constructive eviction"). Further, under CA Civil Code 1940.2, a landlord may be liable for statutory penalties of up to \$2,000.00 per violation for committing "a significant and intentional" violation of illegal entry into a tenant's unit as specified in CA Civil Code 1954.

## Tenant does not need to be present for Landlord to lawfully enter

A Tenant has a right to be present during the inspection, but Civil Code 1954 does not give a Tenant the right to deny entry because the Tenant is unable to be present at the time of the entry. Denying the Landlord lawful entry because the Tenant cannot be there at the time of the entry may give the Landlord the right to evict the Tenant under the Just Cause provisions of the Rent Ordinance.

# Landlord Entry Under CA Civil Code 1954

## Landlord may enter only for:

- In case of emergency.
  - To make necessary or agreed repairs, decorations, alterations or improvements, supply necessary or agreed services, or exhibit the dwelling unit to prospective or actual purchasers, mortgagees, tenants, workers, or contractors or to make an inspection pursuant to subdivision (f) of Section 1950.5.
  - When the tenant has abandoned or surrendered the premises.
  - Pursuant to court order.
  - For the purposes set forth in Chapter 2.5 (commencing with Section 1954.201)(To check water submetering)
  - To comply with the provisions of Article 2.2 (commencing with Section 17973) of Chapter 5 of Part 1.5 of Division 13 of the Health and Safety Code. (To ensure compliance for patios, balconies, etc.)
- 
- Landlords may not enter for general inspections.
  - Landlord must give the tenant written notice to enter (reasonable notice), at least 24 hours prior to entry
  - Landlord does not need to provide written or verbal notice to enter to respond to an emergency (such as fire, flooding, etc.), abandonment or if the tenant is present and consents at the time of entry.
  - The tenant cannot demand that they be there when the landlord enters
  - Entry must be during “normal business hours”
  - Landlord must state the time and date, as well as the purpose of the entry in the written notice
  - In Richmond, it is “Just Cause” to evict a tenant who denies a landlord lawful entry, after the tenant has been warned to cease denying lawful access and continues to do so (not listed in Urgency Ordinance).

# THANK YOU!

**Questions?**

**Contact the Richmond Rent Program**

**510-234-RENT (7368)**

**[rent@ci.richmond.ca.us](mailto:rent@ci.richmond.ca.us)**

**Visit our website:**

**[www.richmondrent.org](http://www.richmondrent.org)**

**Rent Program presentations can be found at:**

**[richmondrent.org/workshops](http://richmondrent.org/workshops)**