



Tip Sheet For Tenants

WORKING WITH YOUR NEIGHBOURS

Prepared by the Tenant Duty Counsel Program and funded by Legal Aid Ontario

This publication contains general information intended to assist the public at large. It is not legal advice about your situation. You should consult a lawyer or legal worker for advice on your particular situation.

If you have problems with your rental unit (such as poor repair, cockroaches or mice, huge rent increases or security concerns), you are likely not alone. Why not consider working with other tenants to solve your common problems?

Many larger apartment buildings have a tenants' association – this allows tenants to get together, discuss their issues and talk about solutions. This tip sheet will discuss some easy ways to start off your own tenants' association, if your building does not have one.

WHY SHOULD I THINK ABOUT STARTING OR JOINING A TENANTS' ASSOCIATION IN MY BUILDING?

There is strength in numbers. Your landlord or super will find it harder to ignore your concerns if they are voiced by a group of people rather than you alone.

Starting or joining a tenants' association will help educate you and others about your rights as tenants.

Tenants' associations are great places for tenants to learn or share strategies for dealing with the landlord. They can also be good places to get to know your neighbours better.

HOW CAN I START A TENANTS' ASSOCIATION?

STEP 1: CALL A TENANTS' MEETING

This is simpler than it sounds. Some helpful hints:

- Talk to any friends you have in the building and get them involved.
- Pick a time and place for the meeting. Depending on the size of the building, you could choose to meet in someone's apartment, in the lobby of the building, or in a nearby library, school or church hall.

- A few days before the meeting, make up a flyer telling people where and when it will be. Put a flyer under the door of the apartment and post it in the laundry room and other common areas of the building. **HINT: offering doughnuts or pop is a great way to get people out!**

STEP 2: HOLD YOUR FIRST MEETING

Your first meeting should have three goals:

1. Get tenants together to identify common issues.
2. Decide what to do about these issues.
3. Start creating a “plan of action”.

Some suggested steps to help make your first meeting a successful one:

- If your building has many newcomers to Canada, consider approaching tenants from those language groups who also speak English and ask if they will interpret for you at the meeting.
- Ask tenants to sign in at the meeting and to provide contact information.
- Pick someone to “chair” or run the meeting so that tenants can move from sharing or “venting” about their problems into forming a plan of action. Pick someone else to take notes at the meeting.
- Provide a questionnaire for tenants to fill in with their concerns while the meeting is going on (see attached sample).
- Use your time wisely. Allow the tenants to discuss problems for 1/3 of the meeting. Spend the next 1/3 of the meeting identifying common problems.
- Use the final 1/3 of the meeting to come up with the first steps in a “plan of action”. ***The meeting should be no longer than 1 ½ hours.***
- Try to keep the “plan of action” simple when you first start, and get volunteers from the meeting to assist you with it. (see attached sample)
- At the end of the meeting, ask for volunteers to help you set up the next meeting. Make sure to pick a date and time for the next meeting before everyone leaves.

STEP 3: PLANNING FUTURE MEETINGS

Some tips on how to keep interest up after the first meeting:

- Get other people involved. You may wish to form a “Steering Committee” with a handful of interested tenants.
- Keep your goals for each meeting do-able. Your tenants’ association will have more success in the long term if goals can be completed from meeting to meeting.
- Consider forming an official tenants’ association after a couple of meetings. See **“Where can I go for more information?”** at the bottom of this tip sheet for resources to help you with this.
- Ask a legal professional to attend one meeting to talk about tenants’ rights. Contact your community legal clinic for more information.
- Remember, above all, that a tenants’ association does not have to be all work! Joining a tenants’ association can be a great way to get to know your neighbours better. Many tenants’ associations also hold “socials” or barbecues or run bake sales or yard sales to raise money.

WILL MY LANDLORD TRY TO EVICT ME IF I GET INVOLVED?

It is **illegal** for your landlord to evict you for joining or organizing a tenants’ association. Further, it is against the law for your landlord to prevent you from holding a tenants’ meeting in the common areas of your building.

If you decide to have your meeting in the lobby of your building, make sure that you do not block access to and from the building or elevators by other tenants while you are meeting.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Contact your local **Community Legal Clinic** for free advice on landlord and tenant matters. To find the telephone number for your clinic call Legal Aid Ontario at (416) 979-1446 or 1-800-668-8258.

You can also call the **Tenant Hotline** at 416- 921-9494 for free information and referrals to your local legal clinic.

You can find information on line at www.acto.ca or www.cleo.on.ca.

You can call the Landlord and Tenant Board toll free at 416-645-8080 from within Toronto calling area or 1-888-332-3234 from outside Toronto. Their internet address is www.ltb.gov.on.ca

Questionnaire – Tenants’ Issues

*Please answer all of the questions you feel comfortable with answering. We are asking for this information to help identify common problems in the building – the more information we have, the easier it will be to come up with a strategy to deal with our problems. We will use this information **ONLY** for purposes of planning future meetings.*

Name:

Address/Unit Number:

Telephone Number:

E-mail Address: _____

I live in a bachelor / _____
bedroom apartment.

There are _____ people
living in my apartment.

My current rent is \$ _____

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions:

1. **Repair/Maintenance Issues**

Do you have problems with maintenance or repair in your unit? **YES / NO** (circle one)

If YES, please tell us what those problems are in the space below.

What do you think about the state of repair in the **common areas of the building?**
(examples: lobby, laundry room, parking garage, hallways)

If you have been able to get the landlord to deal with some of your problems, please tell us how (EXAMPLES: filling in a work order, writing a letter to the landlord, calling the City inspectors).

2. Privacy Issues

Does your landlord or super provide you with notice before entering your apartment to do repair work? **YES / NO** (circle one)

If **YES**, is the notice in writing? **YES / NO** (circle one)

If **YES**, is the notice given at least 24 hours before they enter? **YES / NO** (circle one)

Has your landlord or super ever tried to come into your apartment for any reason without any notice to you? **YES / NO** (circle one)

If **YES**, please give us some details below.

3. Security Issues

Do you feel safe in your apartment or in the common areas? Please describe.

4. Disability Issues

Is the apartment building fully accessible to you and your family? **YES / NO** (circle one)

If **NO**, please describe what problems you have accessing the building.

5. Other Issues

Please use this space to tell us about any other problems you might have with your apartment. If there are any employees of the landlord who have been either helpful or unhelpful to you, please let us know that too.

Thank you for helping us make this a better building to live in!!!

Tenants' Plan of Action

PLEASE NOTE: this is intended to give you an example of what a sample plan of action might look like after your first tenants' meeting. Please feel free to make up a blank version of this form and fill it in as your record of what was discussed and decided at each meeting.

Address of Building: *1111 Main Street, Anytown*

Date/Time/Location of This Meeting: *21 January 2003, 7:30 p.m., lobby*

Date/Location of Next Meeting: *4 February 2003, 7:30 p.m., Anytown Public Library, meeting room 3*

Common Issues focused on at this meeting:

- *many of the apartments are infested with cockroaches*
- *many tenants reported that they have been asking the landlord to make major repairs for months with no success*
- *the elevators break down constantly and remain broken for days*

Steps suggested for all tenants:

- *keep putting in work orders for everything you have problems with.*

Action items for next meeting:

<u>Volunteer/s</u>	<u>Task</u>
<i>Maria K.</i>	<i>call property standards inspector at the City and report back</i>
<i>Jing Li</i>	<i>draft a letter to the landlord summarizing the common concerns. Bring to next meeting so that all the tenants can sign it.</i>
<i>Roger T., Giorgio S</i>	<i>help with distributing flyers for the next meeting (to be done by 31 January)</i>
<i>Pho</i>	<i>translate flyer for the next meeting into Vietnamese (to be done by 28 January)</i>

Future goals (to be discussed further at next meeting):

- *whether we should take the landlord to the Landlord and Tenant Board*
- *bringing in someone from the legal clinic to talk to us about our rights*