

Chapter 2

HOUSING ISSUES

Most housing developments encounter issues concerning pets, parking, playgrounds, smoking, and use of common areas. You need clear, consistently applied policies to manage these and other issues. The policies you develop should respect residents' privacy and the diverse ways people live. If possible, give residents an opportunity to review, discuss and recommend changes to the policies.

Some of BC Housing's policies are described below as examples. You can also contact the BC Non-Profit Housing Association at 604-527-8859 or 1-800-494-8859, and the Co-op Housing Federation of BC at 604-879-5111 or 1-866-879-5111, to find out how other organizations approach these issues, and for information on the BCNPHA's Policy Template Manual and the CHF BC's policy workshops and resource materials.

Parking

Parking frequently becomes a contentious issue, so it's important to have a parking policy and enforce it consistently. As an example, BC Housing's tenancy agreement states:

- Residents may only park vehicles that are operational, licensed and insured.
- Residents must obtain prior written consent to park full-sized trucks, recreation vehicles, commercial vehicles, boats or trailers.
- Vehicles considered dangerous, not roadworthy, or vehicles leaking fluid must be removed within 24 hours.
- Guests may park in designated visitor parking areas only.
- BC Housing can tow away, at residents' expense, any vehicles improperly parked, or parked in a way that contravenes the agreement.

Residents are advised of the parking regulations when they sign the tenancy agreement. We review the need for parking at a development, and use one of three options, depending on the building and how much parking is available:

Unassigned parking ~ Residents and guests can park in any spot in the parking areas.

Decal parking ~ We issue parking decals for residents' vehicles. If a vehicle does not have a decal and is parked in resident parking, we post a written notice on the vehicle to:

- Contact the caretaker to register the vehicle if it belongs to a resident, or
- Park the vehicle in visitor parking or off site if it doesn't belong to a resident.



If the same vehicle is seen in resident parking again, we post a second notice warning the vehicle will be towed if found on BC Housing property a third time. Then if the vehicle shows up again, we arrange for it to be towed away at the owner's expense, and keep copies of the dated notices in the site office.

Registered parking ~ We register each resident vehicle, record the vehicle make, model and license plate number, and assign a parking spot. If another vehicle parks in an assigned spot, we have the vehicle towed at the owner's expense.

In addition, if a resident vehicle is unlicensed, inoperative or uninsured, we give the resident seven days written notice to remedy the situation. We may negotiate a grace period, allowing a resident to use unlicensed vehicle insurance to address the issue, except when:

- Site parking is not sufficient.
- The vehicle is not roadworthy.
- The resident already parks several vehicles on site.
- The resident repeatedly requests permission to use unlicensed vehicle insurance.

We put the agreement in writing, and obtain a copy of the insurance. If the problem isn't resolved by the end of this grace period, we advise the resident the vehicle will be towed and when.

Signs are posted at each development stating that unauthorized vehicles will be towed away at the owner's expense and the location they'll be towed. Check with the towing company to determine if it will post signs. And check with municipal authorities to ensure the sign wording conforms to legal standards.

Use of Common Areas

COMMON/RECREATION ROOMS

As an example, here are some of the guidelines that govern use of common areas at BC Housing developments:

- Activities should be for the benefit of residents.
- Individuals or groups of residents cannot be restricted from using common areas at their site unless the date conflicts with a previously scheduled event.
- Common areas are not rented to external groups, unless the residents' association or landlord gives approval, to ensure residents have first priority for using the space.

BC Housing signs an agreement with the residents' association to cover these terms and other logistical concerns such as cleaning, maintenance, noise, obtaining a license to serve alcohol, and providing a list of events to the Property Portfolio Manager. The principle underlying the policy is that common space is intended for residents' use.

Use the sample *Space Use Agreement* in the appendix on [page 56](#) to help you set up a similar agreement, or call your Property Portfolio Manager for advice. In addition, you can contact the BC Non-Profit Housing Association at 604-527-8859 or 1-800-494-8859, or the Co-operative Housing Federation of BC at 604-879-5111 or 1-866-879-5111, for sample policies. Whatever approach you use, let residents know what activities the common areas can be used for and how they access these rooms.

OUTDOOR AREAS AND PLAYGROUNDS

The BC Non-Profit Housing Association has developed optional policies for outdoor areas in its *Policy Template Manual*, which include:

- Recognizing that play is an important activity for children, and encouraging children to play safely and with regard for the privacy of other residents.
- Playing is prohibited in the garage, driveways or internal roadways of the development.
- House rules may designate certain areas for certain types of play or age groups, or as passive areas. (By a vote of residents.)
- Adult size bicycles are to be walked on sidewalks within the development.
- Skateboarding and roller blading are not permitted on the grounds, or are restricted to areas specified in the house rules.
- No excessive noise, such as loud parties, stereos or yelling, in the outdoor areas. Organized activities should end by dark.
- Parents are responsible for supervising their children, and ensuring toys and games are not left outside in common areas.
- Anyone caught vandalizing property will be responsible for correcting or paying for the damage.

You may also want to have play equipment for younger and older children, with rules covering the hours the playground is open, bullying, and people disciplining others' kids.

Smoking

In BC Housing developments, people can smoke in their own units, but smoking is not allowed in lobbies, hallways, laundry rooms, lounges and other common areas.

Check your local bylaws, as many bylaws ban smoking in all public areas. If you have an option, you need to decide whether to make all public areas non-smoking, given the health impact on all residents and staff.



Pet Ownership

BC Housing has *Pet Ownership Terms* for residents in the buildings we manage, because many people enjoy having a pet for companionship. Here's how our pet policy works, as an example:

- People living in most buildings can keep a bird, fish, rodent, or one dog or cat, as long as the pet doesn't disturb or harm other residents. Cats and dogs must be spayed or neutered, and pets are registered with us when people move in, or when a resident acquires a pet after moving in. We provide tags for dogs and cats. Certain breeds of dogs are restricted.
- When there are two elevators, pets aren't allowed in one. Cats are permitted up to the seventh floor, except where the majority of tenants in a building have voted to allow cats on additional floors. Dogs are permitted up to the third floor.
- Pets are not allowed in the lounges, laundry rooms, or libraries, unless the animal is a dog trained to assist people with special needs.
- Dogs must be on a leash and all pets must be kept under control in common areas of the building or on the grounds.
- Residents are expected to clean up their pets' waste.
- We ask people to name a contact who can look after their pet in case of emergency.

BC Housing's *Pet Ownership Terms* are included in the appendix on [page 58](#). For assistance drafting a pet policy of your own, call your PPM, the BC Non-Profit Housing Association or the Co-operative Housing Federation of BC for samples. Some housing providers don't allow pets, while others allow small pets such as fish, birds and cats, but no dogs.

Arrears

Non-profit and co-operative groups need a consistent, fair arrears policy and process to:

- Help ensure rent/housing charges are paid on time.
- Help prevent evictions for late payment or non-payment of rent/housing charges.
- Keep the organization from falling behind financially.
- Provide the documentation needed to justify an eviction or termination if it becomes necessary.

Refer to Chapter 4 of the *Financial Management Guide* for more information on developing an arrears process.

Death of a Resident Living Alone

You need a process to guide your staff and directors when someone dies. Caretakers should be familiar with the policy so they can respond at any time. Include detailed procedures in their training or orientation package. BC Housing's guidelines for handling the death of a resident who lived alone include:

- Calling 911, or the police department in areas without 911 service, to report the death as soon as you become aware someone has died. The police will call the ambulance service. Do not touch anything or use the phone in the unit.
- If there's a pet, call the emergency contact person to take the pet, or arrange boarding for the animal if you can't reach the emergency contact.
- Change the lock after the body has been removed to secure the property and prevent unauthorized access.
- If there is no designated contact for the deceased resident, call the coroner's office within five days. If the coroner does not have an executor on record, they will contact the Public Trustee to respond. Then all inquiries should be directed to the trustee.
- Only allow the executor of the estate, the spouse, or the closest relative access to the suite. Ask the executor to see the will and some identification. If there is no will, ask the spouse or relative for a birth or marriage certificate or deposition.
- If there is a dispute among relatives, ask the coroner's representative for direction.
- Friends should not be given access.

The police will notify the family about the death. However, your staff or a director will need to offer condolences and communicate with family members about the removal of the deceased person's property and the date the unit will be vacated. Expect the family to experience a period of grieving, which may affect your interactions with them. In addition, you may want to provide staff with opportunities to debrief after a death occurs, because the situation can be difficult and emotional for them. For example, you could hold a memorial service in the building for staff, residents, and directors, or arrange a session with a grief counsellor.

We have a more detailed procedure for responding to a death. Call Housing Operations at 604-433-1711 for a copy.



Residents Needing Care

If you operate a development for seniors and people with disabilities, residents may be interested in setting up a program to monitor people's health. For example, each morning residents can hang a card that says, "I'm okay" on their door handle, and remove it at night. Volunteers check to see if the cards are displayed in the morning and removed in the evening, so they know quickly whether someone needs assistance.

On occasion, a resident may ask to have someone else move in for a few months, so they can take care of a sick relative or friend. You can support this type of home care, but in these situations people are not given an extra bedroom.

If a resident is admitted to hospital or a health care facility, you can hold their unit until they return. However, if a resident has to remain in a care facility and can no longer live independently, the tenancy should be ended.

If someone needs a live-in attendant for a brief period—following an operation, for example—they would keep their current unit. But if a resident needs a permanent attendant, they qualify for an extra bedroom. (See [page 38](#) of the Rent Calculation section for information on when attendants pay for housing.)

Sharing Information

One way to familiarize new residents with the development is to provide a handbook or move in package that includes information on the:

- Caretaker/Co-op Coordinator's name and phone number.
- Emergency and regular maintenance phone numbers.
- Use of community space.
- Parking.
- Recycling programs and garbage disposal.
- Residents' organizations.
- Pet policy.
- Laundry room hours.
- Gardening.
- Rent/housing charge payments and the annual rent review.
- Fire and earthquake safety procedures.
- Dispute resolution process.
- Snow shoveling.
- Rental insurance.
- Residential Tenancy/Co-operative Association Acts.



- Arrears policy.
- Community agencies and resources.
- The types of housing issues you can respond to and the issues that fall under police jurisdiction.

Let residents know about any policy or program changes that affect them. Use a notice board, flyer, or newsletter to keep people informed about these updates, as well as:

- Services such as financial and job counselling.
- Health information events.
- Community events.
- Society/co-op activities.
- Educational opportunities.

Arrange for agencies such as the fire department, multicultural service organizations, community groups, and sports clubs to make presentations to give residents important safety and community information. Or you can co-sponsor these events with the residents' organization at your development.

BC Housing has prepared a resident handbook for people living in the buildings we manage. Contact your PPM if you would like a copy to use as a guide in developing your own. And the BC Non-Profit Housing Association and Co-op Housing Federation of BC can put you in touch with other groups to find out how they share information with residents.
