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TIPS FOR PREVENTING DRUG SALES IN RENTAL UNITS

One of the worst problems that a landlord can have is when people start selling illegal drugs from a rental unit. Drug use and sales are a slippery slope for a landlord because a single drug operation attracts chronic criminals and drives away good tenants. This lowers potential rents and makes it easier for other drug users and sellers to move in. For that matter, a single kitchen methamphetamine lab operation can result in the condemnation of a large multi-unit property because of toxic waste problems. It is absolutely imperative that landlords watch diligently for drug operations and stop them before they get established. The following are some tips for keeping drug operations out of your rentals.

BUSINESS PRACTICES

- Investigate potential tenants thoroughly. Require a thorough application. Consider using a commercial tenant investigating service if one is available in your area. Consider charging prospective tenants a non-refundable application fee and using that fee to pay for investigating the tenant. (usually about \$25).
- Require substantial deposits before renting.
- Immediately call the police whenever you see a homeless person or drunk near the units.
- Promptly notify tenants when they violate their leases. Consistently enforce rules using consistent procedures. Don't tailor your reactions to individual situations. For example, if rent is due on the fifth by 5:00 pm then at 5:05 pm you should issue 3 day notices to all tenants who haven't paid. Set reasonable late fees and notice fees and don't ever waive them.
- Be careful about accepting rent from anyone other than the person who signs the lease.
- Monitor whether the people you rented to are actually living in the apartment. Drug gangs occasionally sneak past prospective tenant investigations by using front people to rent for them.
- Screen your employees.

- Mix economic groups in your units. Mixing economic groups works better than clustering poor people together.

SECURITY PRECAUTIONS

- Develop a neighborhood watch organization.
- Increase lighting around your units and in the halls and stairways.
- Use sodium lights where possible to save on electricity. This will allow you to increase lighting without increasing costs.
- Aggressively maintain security devices such as locks, window locks and door jams. Re-key all locks between tenants.
- Replace any sliding glass doors with a more secure door system.
- Install dead bolt locks on doors.
- Make sure apartment addresses and numbers are visible so that the police and fire departments can respond quickly.
- Watch for and take notes on suspicious automobile and foot traffic. Suspicious automobile and foot traffic is often marked by the following:
 - a. lots of short visits at odd hours.
 - b. People who wear pagers or cellular phones and don't look like they're old enough or employed in such a way that they should need the devices.

Note: Consciously avoid racial profiling. Train your employees to consciously avoid racial profiling. Racial profiling is illegal, immoral and stupid. It doesn't work and it exposes you to the threat of expensive litigation.

- Develop close relationships with local police. If you can, get to know their names. If an officer is especially helpful or responsive, send a note to his or her boss.
- Trim tree branches to at least 10 feet from the ground. Trim bushes to below 3 feet.
- Use fences that can be seen through.
- Watch for Marijuana plants in windows.
- Watch windows for lights the color of grow lights.

- Most leases have a provision for the landlord to reasonably inspect after notifying the tenant. If you suspect drug activity you may want to perform an inspection. If you see paraphernalia, marijuana plants or drugs or if you smell marijuana smoke then you may be able to convince local law officers to obtain a search warrant. Typically your inspection must be reasonable. Keep in mind, however, that if you smell rotting food that you may look for the source of the odor.

MAINTENANCE

- Promptly remove abandoned vehicles from the grounds. Aggressively pursue removal by the authorities if vehicles are abandoned on nearby streets.
- Remove all graffiti within 24 hours of its appearance.
- Keep sidewalks, parking lots, and stairs clean from dirt and other debris.
- Keep the grounds and common areas impeccably clean. Litter and dirt draw crime the way garbage draws rats.