

Apartment Repairs

California state law requires all rental property owners to keep their apartments in livable condition. This includes the following:

- hot and cold running water
- plumbing, gas and heat
- electrical wiring, lighting and equipment
- unbroken doors and windows
- non leaking roofs and walls
- floors, stairways and railings
- clean trash receptacles
- clean building and common areas

If an owner fails to keep an apartment in proper repair, the tenant has several remedies:

1. Demand letter to the owner. Many repair issues are resolved quickly this way. Tenants should say what needs repair and give a reasonable deadline for finishing the work. It's important to date and sign the letter, and always keep a copy! The letter can be sent by certified mail if the tenant wants proof that it was received.

If the owner still won't make the repair, the tenant has several options:

2. Report the problem to a local agency. Some conditions may violate local health or building codes. Plumbing, electrical, structural and other problems are often covered by these laws. Call Code Enforcement (310-458-4984) for more information.

3. File a rent decrease petition. Tenants in rent-controlled units may seek a rent reduction from the Rent Control Board (310-458-8751) if a landlord has refused to perform necessary repairs or has taken away certain services such as parking or storage.

4. Sue in Small Claims Court. Tenants may sue their landlords in Small Claims Court for up to \$10,000 to cover money lost or spent as a result of disrepair. No lawyer is required. For more information go to http://www.dca.ca.gov/publications/small_claims/ or call the Santa Monica Superior Court's Small Claims Information Line (310-260-1887) or the City Attorney's Office (310-458-8336).

5. Mediate. If both sides agree to it, most disputes can be resolved through mediation. Call the Center for Civic Mediation (877-896-6533).

6. Repair and deduct. The law allows tenants in some situations to make repairs themselves and deduct the cost from their rent. However, this method can be risky. Tenants are advised never deduct or withhold rent without the advice of an attorney.

7. File a complaint with the City Attorney. If you believe that your landlord is refusing to perform repairs in order to harass you, contact the City Attorney's Office (310-458-8336).

If you would like more information about your rights or responsibilities, call the City Attorney's Office at (310) 458-8336.