

# HOW TO REPORT SUSPECTED HOUSING VIOLATIONS

## DC HOUSING CODE STANDARDS

The Department of Buildings (DOB) is mandated to ensure public health, safety, and welfare by enforcing property maintenance codes on all residential and non-residential structures in the District of Columbia.

DOB enforces the minimum requirement for premises, structures, equipment, and facilities for light, ventilation, space, heating, sanitation, protection from the elements, life safety, safety from fire and other hazards, and for safe and sanitary maintenance. In addition to these requirements, all rental properties in the District of Columbia must be properly licensed and inspected. To check the status of a rental property, visit [scout.dca.dc.gov](https://scout.dca.dc.gov) and search by address.

If you feel your apartment or building does not comply with the standards as outlined below, you should take the following steps to identify necessary repairs:

- 1.** Write out a list of code violations using the Housing Code Standards in this section or the more detailed regulations in Title 14 of the DC Municipal Regulations to determine what must be repaired. Make one list of violations for your apartment and another list of violations for common areas such as the hallways, stairs, yard, etc. Sign and date any lists you make. Preserve physical evidence of violations (including photographs of dead insects, rats, or mice) to show to the DC housing inspector. Try to bring a witness with you for complaints.
- 2.** All requests for repairs should be sent in writing to the landlord, resident manager, or rental office asking them to make the repairs. Keep a copy of every letter or note you write and make a list of all calls, letters, and meetings along with the date and time they occurred. When calling the landlord, make certain you obtain the name of the person who takes your complaint. Keep a calendar or other written notes which include when the problems started, when the landlord was contacted, what was done in response to the complaint, and when and if the repairs were completed. Send the letters certified mail, return receipt, and/or obtain a receipt from the landlord for delivery of letters, if possible.

3. If you receive no response to your complaint or the repairs are not made, invite the landlord or resident manager to meet with you or the tenant organization to discuss the violations and repairs.
4. If management still does not respond, you should request a housing inspection by calling or writing the Office of Residential Inspections of the Department of Buildings, 1100 4th Street SW, Washington, DC 20024, or (202) 442-9557. You can also request an inspection via email at [dob@dc.gov](mailto:dob@dc.gov). Please include your name, phone number and summary of your issues.

An inspection will usually be scheduled within a week, but an inspector can respond sooner in emergencies. Remember to keep a copy of every letter or note and make a list of all calls, letters, and meetings along with the date and time they occurred.

If you feel you have a violation that requires immediate attention, contact the Mayor's Call Center by dialing 311 and you will be connected to a DOB On-Duty Inspector. For emergencies, dial 911.

## MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

### INTERIOR OF PROPERTY

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#### **AIR CONDITIONING (A/C):**

The A/C system shall be maintained during the period no later than May 15 and ending no earlier than September 15. The inside temperature in rooms that the A/C system is intended to serve shall equal the greater of 78° F or at least 15° F less than the outside temperature.

#### **BATHROOMS:**

A bathroom must be private and have natural or mechanical ventilation. It must have a bathtub or shower, water closet, lavatory with hot water with a minimum temperature of 110° F) and cold running water. It must also have a waterproof floor and wall base.

#### **CLEANLINESS:**

Dwellings shall be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition.

#### **COOKING ROOM:**

All facilities provided by the landlord for cooking, storage, or refrigeration of food must be maintained in a safe and good working condition. Any cooking-room sink must have cold water and hot water available at minimum temperature of 110° F for running water.

**DOORS:**

All doors' hardware and operating systems shall be maintained in good condition. All doors accessing the dwelling shall be equipped with a deadbolt lock without the use of a key or special knowledge for use from inside of the dwelling.

**ELECTRICITY:**

Every habitable space in a dwelling shall contain at least two separate and remote-receptacle outlets. Every laundry area and bathroom shall contain at least one ground-type receptacle or a receptacle with a ground-fault-circuit interrupter.

**FIRE SAFETY FOR ALL UNITS:**

Smoke detectors are required in every sleeping room, on every level, and in the vicinity of all sleeping rooms. Carbon-monoxide detectors are required in the vicinity of all sleeping rooms where a fuel-burning appliance is present or in a building that has an attached garage. Bars on windows in sleeping rooms shall be releasable or removable from the inside of the room without the use of a key, tool or force greater than that which is required for normal operation of the window.

**FIRES SAFETY FOR CONDOMINIUMS AND APARTMENT BUILDINGS:**

Shall have lighted fire-exit signs, fire extinguishers, and a fire-alarm system.

**FLOORS:**

Floors shall be in good repair and maintained free from hazardous conditions.

**HANDRAILS AND GUARDRAILS:**

Interior flights of stairs having more than three risers shall have a handrail on one side of the stair and every open portion of a stair. Walking surfaces, with a drop of more than 30 inches (762 mm) above the floor or grade below, shall have guards.

**HEAT:**

Heating equipment shall maintain a temperature of not less than 68° F in all habitable rooms and bathrooms between October 1 and May 1. With a two-pipe system, or any other system reasonably requiring more than 15 days to transition from air-conditioning to heat, the heat shall be supplied during a period starting no later than October 15 and ending no earlier than May 1.

**HOT WATER:**

Water-heating facilities shall be properly installed, maintained, and capable of providing an adequate amount of water to be drawn at every lavatory, sink, and bathtub, shower, and laundry facility. The minimum temperature of the water shall be 110° F.

## **INTERIOR SURFACES:**

All interior surfaces shall be maintained in good, clean, dry, and sanitary conditions. Cracks, loose plaster, holes, decay wood, water damage, and other defective surfaces are not allowed.

## **NO UTILITIES:**

It is a code violation for a dwelling lacking utility (water, gas and electricity) to be occupied.

## **PAINT:**

Peeling, chipping, flaking or abraded paint shall be repaired, removed, or covered on windows, window frames, doors, door-frame walls, and ceilings. Pre-1978 structures must be lead-free.

## **PLUMBING:**

All plumbing fixtures shall be properly installed and maintained and shall be free from obstruction and leaks.

## **PRIVACY:**

Bathrooms and bedrooms must have privacy and shall be separate from adjoining spaces. Such rooms shall be arranged so that occupants can access common space without going through another room.

## **RODENTS:**

All rental dwellings must be free of insects and rodents.

## **ROOM AREA:**

Every bedroom shall be a minimum of 70 square feet for the first occupant plus an additional 50 square feet for each additional person using the room.

## **STAIRS:**

Stairs shall be in good repair and maintained free from hazardous conditions.

## **WINDOWS:**

Windows must have screens from March 15 to November 15. Every window and skylight shall be kept in sound condition, good repair, held in position by window hardware, easily openable, and weathertight.

## **EXTERIOR OF PROPERTY**

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### **FOUNDATION WALLS AND EXTERIOR WALLS:**

Foundation walls and exterior walls shall be maintained plumb and free from open cracks and breaks.

**GRADING AND DRAINAGE:**

All premises shall be graded so that all storm drainage flows freely from all parts of the premises into an inlet or place of disposal.

**HANDRAIL AND GUARDRAILS:**

Exterior and interior flights of stairs having more than three risers need a handrail. Guardrails shall be installed on balconies, porches, decks, ramps, and other walking surfaces. Walking surfaces, with a drop of more than 30 inches (762 mm) above the floor or grade below, shall have guards.

**PORCHES, DECKS, BALCONIES AND STAIRWAYS:**

Porches, decks, balconies and stairways shall be maintained structurally sound, in good repair with proper anchorage, and capable of supporting imposed loads.

**RODENT HARBORAGE:**

All structures and exterior property shall be kept free from rodent harborage and infestation.

**ROOFS:**

Roof drains, gutters and downspouts shall be maintained in good repair and free from obstructions. Roof water shall not be discharged in a manner that creates a public nuisance. The roof and flashing shall be sound and tight and shall not have any defects that admit rain.

**SANITATION:**

The exterior of any structure and the outside property shall be maintained in a clean, safe, and sanitary condition.

**SIDEWALKS AND DRIVEWAYS:**

All sidewalks, driveways, walkways, parking spaces, and similar areas are to be maintained, free from hazardous conditions, and kept in a proper state of repair.

**STRUCTURAL MEMBERS:**

Structural members shall be maintained free from deterioration and shall be capable of supporting the imposed dead and live loads.

**TRASH:**

All structures and exterior properties shall be free from the accumulation of rubbish or garbage.

**WEEDS:**

Properties shall be maintained free of weeds or plants growing in excess of 8 inches.

**WOOD SURFACES:**

All exterior wood surfaces including doors, door frames, windows, window frames, trim, and fences shall be protected by covering or treatment. Peeling, chipping, and flaking paint shall be repainted. Pre-1978 structures must be lead-free.