

Code Compliance for Housing and Renter Rights



Seattle Department of
Construction & Inspections

Sustainability & Renters' Rights Committee

March 18, 2022

SDCI PURPOSE AND VALUES

Our Purpose

Helping people build a safe, livable, and inclusive Seattle.

Our Values

- Equity
- Respect
- Quality
- Integrity
- Service

Code Compliance Division

We are:

- **Compliance Inspections, and**
- **Rental Housing Programs**

- **Many acronyms:**
 - **POTA = Property Owner and Tenant Assistance**
 - **RRIO = Rental Registration and Inspection Ordinance**
 - **TRAO = Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance**
 - **EDRA = Economic Displacement Relocation Assistance**

We Administer

Compliance Inspections

(Michele Hunter, Manager)

- Housing and RRIO
- Land Use and Shoreline
- Construction without permits
- Vacant Buildings
- Trees
- Weeds and Vegetation

Rental Housing Programs

(Geoff Tallent, Manager)

- POTA questions and complaints
- TRAO
- EDRA
- RRIO administration
- Renting In Seattle Website & outreach program
- \$2 million Grants Program

How People Find Us

Outreach

- Web portal – seattle.gov/rentinginseattle
- Renting in Seattle phonenumber– 206-684-5700
- Complaint line—206-615-0808
- Infographics and videos
- Trainings and community events

Grants

- Education
- Organizing
- Assistance and counseling



**We Solve
Problems**

Year	Housing Complaints	Renter Rights Complaints & Questions
2021	1,136	3,285
2020	963	2,799
2019	994	2,399
2018	820	2,081
2017	574	437*

**Housing Complaints are 9% of total complaints. Landlord
Tenant complaints and questions are 26%.**

* New tracking system only counted part of year

Common Complaints

Compliance Inspections

- Kitchens: faulty appliances, leaking/clogged faucets, lack of ventilation
- Bathrooms: leaking/clogged faucets, mold and moisture
- Rodents, bugs, other pests
- Security: locks, windows
- Fire Safety: no smoke or CO detectors

Rental Housing Programs

- Deposit Returns
- Rent increases
- Eviction notices
- Landlord entry without proper notice

Case Resolution – all case types

Year resolved	Enforced Compliance	Voluntary Compliance	Law/Other	Total
2018	53%	46%	1%	100%
2019	52%	47%	1%	100%
2020	54%	46%	0%	100%
2021	58%	40%	2%	100%

Voluntary compliance is the goal

Resolves issues faster

Keeps Tenants in their homes
Better relations with Landlord

Efficiently uses resources

Inspectors have more neutral role

How the process works

Tenants and landlords contact SDCI by phone and via the website

Supervising managers assign inspectors or analysts

Staff work through complaints and questions in the order received, except

Emergency housing conditions and eviction issues get priority

The Tools we use

- **Complaints come in, we talk to the renter. Then we talk to the landlords.** Landlords rescind their notices, issue the deposit returns, make repairs, etc.
- Emergencies are top priorities.
 - We issued 22 **Emergency Orders** in 2021.
 - In 2021 SDCI issued **\$108,152 emergency relocation assistance** to 22 tenants when problems were too severe to fix at 6 properties. 16 tenants were from one property.
- For physical issues with a living space, we usually issue **Notices of Violation** with a compliance due date

Fines and Penalties

Notices of Violation (Housing, Prohibited Acts, Just Cause, TRAO)

- NOVs must allow time for compliance. Only if no compliance do penalties accrue.
- Penalties: up to \$150 per day for first ten days, then up to \$500 per day. Inspection fees may also apply.
- Penalty enforcement requires referral to City Attorney

Citations (security deposits, right of first refusal, receipts for payments)

- Usually issue warnings first
- Citations penalties - \$500 first violation. Additional violations are \$1,000.
- May issue Notices of Violation after two citations.
- Appealed to Hearing Examiner

Housing Complaint Challenges

Inspectors must make appointments with tenant to do a housing inspection

Many renters call just as they are moving out and SDCI is unable to inspect before they leave

Sometimes issues get fixed before we get to a site

Sometimes we cannot reach the tenant or they will not call us back

Process changes during the pandemic

Backlog: Housing Inspections and Landlord Tenant (POTA) questions and complaints

Year	Average Days to First Housing Inspection
2018	24.7
2019	18.2
2020	29.0
2021	42.3

Open Housing cases (NOVs) = 143
Open Housing Complaints = 317

POTA Open cases (NOV) = 46
POTA Open complaints = 921

Open complaints can be at several steps in the investigation process

Our focus

Managing Increasing call volume

Training and outreach about the changing regulatory environment

Emerging from pandemic restrictions and limitation

Reducing call response time and backlog

QUESTIONS & RESOURCES

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