

Problems in your community? Be pro-active.

Many people contact National Manufactured Home Owners Association (NMHOA) seeking help with individual problems in their manufactured housing community. Oftentimes, by the time they call NMHOA, their problem has escalated and it may be too late for much of anything to be done.

Here are some useful tips that might help home owners so that they can be as pro-active and prepared as possible to address issues before they get out of control:

1. Know your rights AND responsibilities

- a. Most communities have some sort of rules and regulations which govern tenancy and it is important to know those rules to help avoid misunderstandings with management or other home owners;
- b. Local ordinances and state laws likely apply to residents of MH communities, providing home owners with special rights of tenancy.

2. Write it down (document everything you can)

- a. The first step whenever you fear a problem is brewing, is to take the time to identify what exactly the problem is - sit at your table and write down as clearly and concisely as possible, exactly what is happening and why this is a potential problem;
- b. If the problem relates to a perceived violation of community rules, take photos to show your situation is no different than many others in the community (e.g., you were given a comply/vacate notice for still having your holiday lights draped around your door when they are supposed to come down by Jan 31, but several neighbors also still have their lights up);
- c. If a problem persists over time, such as with overgrown weeds or lack of proper maintenance, take repeated dated photographs at regular intervals to demonstrate the situation was one of neglect and not merely an isolated incident.
- d. If you are attempting to dialog with the community owner/manager about the problem, be sure to keep careful track of what was said, by whom, and on which dates - keep a diary.

3. File a formal complaint

- a. If an informal approach yields no response, file a formal complaint with the community owner/management, if appropriate. Many communities have complaint forms available—fill them out, citing relevant rules or laws and make copies for your records;
- b. Keep a paper trail of all communications related to the issue.

4. Keep it respectful

- a. Communicating with community owners/managers can often be fraught with tension or fear. Be sure to stay respectful even if you are not being treated well—management is in a position of power and you don't want things to get personal;
- b. Shouting, screaming, profanity and name-calling will accomplish little, it is far better to approach management in an unemotional, business-like manner and accompanied by a good friend who can act as a witness if things do get out of hand and;
- c. Remember, community managers are employees taking orders from either a property management company or directly from the owner. If they don't follow orders they might get fired and the new manager might be even worse! Try to remain on cordial terms with management, especially if they are also residents of your community;

- d. Maintain the moral high ground - it will serve you well in the end.

5. Follow up

- a. If you have a conversation with management where certain things are agreed to, follow up with a letter that highlights what you heard and suggest that if you do not hear back from management by a certain date, then you will assume that they too agree with the contents of your letter;
- b. If you agree to do something to rectify the situation, then do it in a timely manner, and contact management to let them know that you have fulfilled your part of the bargain.
- c. Don't give management "ammunition" to use against you by not complying with reasonable rules;
- d. Again, take photographs to document you did what you agreed to do.

6. Reach out to fellow home owners

- a. Is there a home owner association in your community? If so, they are your first line of defense in addressing problems;
- b. If you have no home owner association, ask neighbors if they are having similar problems and attempt to form a group of concerned residents to meet with management or circulate a petition seeking remedies. There is a strength in numbers and the more neighbors who join you, the better your chances of success!

7. Seek outside help

- a. Do not wait until the last minute to seek help. Being pro-active can often make a huge difference;
- b. If you can't find help among fellow residents, seek assistance from housing and senior advocacy groups or governmental entities that might be willing to lend support;
- c. Do not hesitate to contact your elected officials. Much of the relationship between home owners and community owners is dealt with at the local and state level. Sharing a problem situation with your elected officials helps educate them about the issues related to manufactured housing community living and could encourage them to champion legislation that would result in stronger legal protections for manufactured home owners. If management is unresponsive or at fault, write your community owner and "carbon copy" your elected officials with such correspondence;
- d. Consider contacting local media. Press coverage is a way to help tell our story and publicly expose injustice but should be saved for the most outrageous cases;
- e. If the situation is legal in nature, then contact your local bar association to find out what resources may be available to you - local legal clinics, pro bono attorneys, legal aid, senior services, etc. Try to find attorneys with experience in mobile/manufactured home law;
- f. Contact NMHOA - we are here to help you - ishbel@nmhoa.org 206.851.6385