



*What You Should Know About*

# The Housing Inspection Services Division



**Department of Building Inspection  
1660 Mission Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103**

**General Information 415-558-6088**

**Code Questions 415-558-6084**

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**[www.sfgov.org/dbi](http://www.sfgov.org/dbi)**

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## WHAT IS THE HOUSING INSPECTION SERVICES DIVISION?

Housing Inspection Services (HIS) is the Division within San Francisco's Department of Building Inspection which implements and enforces the San Francisco Housing Code and pertinent related City codes.

The Housing Inspection Services Division is located on the 6th floor of 1660 Mission Street. The Division phone number is (415) 558-6220.

The San Francisco Housing Code contains minimum maintenance requirements for existing residential buildings to safeguard life, limb, health, property and public welfare.

Housing Inspection Services provides assistance by:

- Responding to complaints associated with safety hazards and the lack of maintenance in residential buildings.
- Performing Routine Inspections of Apartment Buildings and Hotels in San Francisco.
- Providing inspections to determine if residential properties are in compliance with San Francisco's Residential Energy Ordinance. (For further information obtain the Department Guide titled "The Residential Energy Conservation Ordinance RECO")
- Providing public information regarding authorized uses prescribed by finalized Building Permits for Apartment Buildings and Hotels in the City.
- Advising residential property owners how to comply with Housing and related Code requirements.
- Annual inspections are made for all Residential Hotels.
- Investigating complaints regarding lack of heat to apartments, dwelling units, and guest rooms. ( For more information obtain the Department brochure entitled "What You Should Know About The Heat Ordinance") and review the enclosed maintenance checklist.
- Processing and enforcing the San Francisco Housing Code by issuing Notices of Violation, Citations & Emergency Orders where appropriate, when the provisions of the Housing Code are not complied within a timely manner.

## WHAT ARE THE HOUSING INSPECTORS OFFICE HOURS AND WHEN ARE THEY AVAILABLE TO PERFORM INSPECTIONS?

The Housing Inspection Services Counter is open from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday.

An Office Duty Housing Inspector is available to

answer general questions by phone or at the Housing Inspection Counter from 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM & 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

District Inspector's Office Hours are 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM & 4:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

The District Inspectors' are generally available to make inspections from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM Monday through Friday.

## WHEN DO I MAKE A COMPLAINT TO HOUSING INSPECTION SERVICES?

If you are adversely impacted by a substandard condition existing within a residential building which poses a safety hazard resulting from damage or lack of maintenance, you may make a complaint to Housing Inspection Services.

Before making a complaint to Housing Inspections Services note that:

- Tenant's rights regarding reduction of services, withholding of rent, or eviction should be directed to the San Francisco Residential Rent Stabilization and Arbitration Board at (415) 252-4600.
- Complaints regarding yard debris, garbage, and severe vermin infestation should be directed to the Department of Health Environmental Health Services at (415) 255-3610.
- The complainant should attempt to contact the owner or manager of the property to make them aware of the problem so that the condition may be corrected as quickly as possible.
- Housing Inspection Services has no jurisdiction over furnishings such as window coverings.

## HOW DO I MAKE A COMPLAINT TO HOUSING INSPECTION SERVICES?

To make a complaint to Housing Inspection Services you may:

- Contact HIS by phone at (415) 558-6220, Monday through Friday (except legal holidays), between 8:00 AM & 5:00 PM and submit your complaint.
- Visit the HIS counter and make your complaint in person during the business hours specified above.
- Send a letter specifying the information indicated below, to Housing Inspection Services, 6th floor, 1660 Mission Street, San Francisco CA, 94103-2414.

## WHAT INFORMATION DO I NEED TO MAKE A COMPLAINT?

To investigate your complaint, please provide the street

address of the subject property and a clear description and location of the problem.

Resolution of your complaint will occur much faster if you can provide a name and phone number of the caretaker (property owner or agent) responsible for the subject building.

You may make a complaint anonymously, however:

- You will have to contact the District Inspector for the status of the complaint.
- You must be a named complainant if you are making a complaint regarding conditions inside your own apartment or guest room.

## WHAT ARE THE STEPS IN THE COMPLAINT PROCESS?

Once received, complaints are put into a computer tracking system and assigned to a District Housing Inspector.

If the complainant has given a name and phone number, the District Inspector will contact the complainant within 48 hours to schedule a field inspection.

If the complainant is anonymous, the District Inspector will attempt to gain entry to the property to investigate the complaint.

## WHAT IS A NOTICE OF VIOLATION?

If violations of the Housing Code are found at the time of inspection, a written Notice of Violation will be posted on the building and sent to the property owner.

The Notice of Violation specifies what corrective work is needed and when all work must be completed. The Notice of Violation will typically give the property owner from 7 to 30 days to correct all violations.

## HOW DO I COMPLY WITH A NOTICE OF VIOLATION?

The property owner must do all corrective work and have a Final Inspection to clear all violations and abate the case.

If the Notice of Violation specifies that a Building Permit is required, contact the issuing District Housing Inspector for instructions.

(For further information obtain the Department brochure entitled "What You Should Know About Construction Permits").

If the Notice of Violation requires Plumbing or Electrical Permits, see the two Department informational brochures entitled "What You Should

Know About Plumbing Permits,” and “What You Should Know About Electrical Permits.”

## HOW CAN I GET A COPY OF A NOTICE OF VIOLATION?

A complainant can acquire a copy of any Notice of Violation issued by Housing Inspection Services at the Division’s 6th floor counter. There is a nominal copying charge.

## WHAT ARE CITATIONS AND EMERGENCY ORDERS?

A Housing Inspector may issue a Citation to a property owner, agent or operator of an Apartment House or Hotel for failure to provide heat or for other Housing Code violations. Citation fines are set by the San Francisco Housing Code and Municipal Court.

In serious & imminent hazard situations, the Director of the Department of Building Inspection can issue an Emergency Order requiring the property owner to take and complete corrective action immediately.

If all required work is not done within the time frame specified in the Emergency Order, the City can have the work done and bill or lien the property for all costs involved in correcting the hazardous condition.

## WHAT IS A DIRECTOR’S HEARING?

If the property owner does not do the required work within the time period specified on the Notice of Violation and it does not appear that progress is being made to comply, the case will be scheduled for a hearing before the Director’s representative.

## WHAT IS A DIRECTOR’S ORDER OF ABATEMENT?

An Order of Abatement is issued at a Director’s Hearing. The Order will state the required actions and timeline for compliance. Orders of Abatement are recorded at the City Recorder’s Office.

## WHAT ARE ASSESSMENT OF COSTS?

Once a Director’s order has been issued, the cost of preparation for and appearance at the hearing and all prior and subsequent attendant costs related to the code enforcement action shall be assessed upon the property owner. This is called Assessment of Costs pursuant to Section 102.16 of the San Francisco Building Code.

## **CAN A LIEN BE PUT ON THE OWNER'S PROPERTY TAX BILL IF THE ASSESSMENT OF COSTS ARE NOT PAID?**

A Special Assessment Lien can be placed on the property tax bill and legal penalties can be levied if the Assessment of Costs are not paid within the required time frame pursuant to Sections 102.3, 102.12, 102.17-102.19, 108, tables 1-K and 1G of the San Francisco Building Code.

## **WHAT ARE THE CODE ENFORCEMENT COSTS TO THE PROPERTY OWNER ASSOCIATED WITH CLEARING A NOTICE OF VIOLATION?**

A reinspection fee of \$71.92 (pursuant to Section 110, Table 1-G of the San Francisco Building Code) will be charged to the property owner on every inspection after the initial reinspection in which all work is not completed prior to a Director's Hearing.

After a Director's Hearing in which a Director's Order of Abatement has been issued and recorded, the property owner will be charged an hourly rate for inspector and clerical time taken to clear all violations. For further information see "What are Assessment of Costs?".

## **HOW DO I SCHEDULE AN INSPECTION?**

Contact the District Inspector between the Hours indicated above.

The District Inspector will need 24 to 48 hours notice to schedule most inspection requests.

## **HOW CAN I GET A COPY OF THE SAN FRANCISCO HOUSING CODE?**

You may purchase a copy of the San Francisco Housing Code locally at Stacey's Books and the Builder's Booksource. Call ahead for availability.

The Housing Code is also available for purchase from the publisher: General Code Publishers, Corp. at : 72 Hinchey Rd., Rochester, NY 14624, 1-800-836-8834.

You may review the Housing Code at the San Francisco Main Library in the Government Information Center (415) 557-4500, or at the San Francisco (City Hall) Law Library, (415) 554-6823.

## **HOW DO I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CODE ENFORCEMENT PROCESS?**

Obtain the Department's brochure entitled "What You Should Know About The Department Of Building Inspection Code Enforcement Process".

## WHAT ITEMS SHOULD BE MAINTAINED PER THE HOUSING CODES?

ALL PROPERTY OWNERS OR MANAGERS OF THE RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS DESCRIBED ABOVE ARE REQUIRED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO HOUSING CODE TO MAINTAIN THE FOLLOWING ITEMS AT ALL TIMES.

1. **MAINTAIN CLEAR & UNOBSTRUCTED MEANS OF EGRESS:** Please keep all means of egress, primary (front stairs, exit corridors), and secondary (rear stairs, fire escapes) free from encumbrances (such as storage, flower pots, household items, laundry lines, and any tripping hazards). These paths of travel are to be completely clear at all times for emergency exiting.
2. **MAINTAIN FIRE ESCAPES:** Check all fire escape ladders to ensure that they are fully operational (in particular the cable and all moving parts) and that drop ladders are not obstructed. You should have an industry professional inspect and service your fire escapes annually.
3. **MAINTAIN CENTRAL SMOKE/FIRE ALARM SYSTEMS & SMOKE DETECTORS:** In apartment houses and hotels maintain the central smoke/fire alarm system with the operational light indicating on within the supervision panel box, and annual Fire Department certification clearly posted in those buildings where applicable. In all residential occupancies check to confirm that all required smoke detectors are installed and fully operational in all sleeping or guest rooms, and at the top of every public stairway, and on every third floor below. Replace batteries annually. Do not paint over smoke detectors.
4. **MAINTAIN & RETAG FIRE EXTINGUISHERS:** In all apartment houses and hotels a Type 2A 10BC or equivalent Fire Extinguisher is required on every floor of all public hallways. Required Fire Extinguishers must be serviced and retagged by an industry professional annually (this includes recently purchased fire extinguishers)..
5. **MAINTAIN ALL WOOD DECKS, EXIT CORRIDORS, STAIRS, GUARD RAILS, HAND RAILS & UTILITY LADDERS (ATTACHED TO THE BUILDING):** You should have all of these existing items inspected annually for dry rot, fungus, deterioration or decay by a licensed professional pest control contractor, general building contractor, architect, or engineer to ensure their safety and stability. Have these professionals provide you with a written report of any recommended repairs. Obtain building permits for all structural repairs.

6. MAINTAIN VISIBLE PROPERTY ADDRESS NUMBERING: Your residential building must have the address numbers mounted at the front of the building at a minimum size of 4 inches in a color contrasting from the building. The address numbers should be clearly visible from the street by emergency vehicles. In addition, all guestrooms should be clearly identified by name, letter, or number.
7. MAINTAIN GARAGES & STORAGE AREAS: In all apartment houses of 5 units or more and all hotels, remove combustible storage from all storage areas that do not have fire sprinklers. Absolutely no combustible storage may be kept under stairwells without a proper fire sprinkler system. Garages are only to be used for the vehicle storage incidental to the apartment house or hotel use.
8. MAINTAIN GARBAGE ROOMS & GARBAGE RECEPTACLES: All garbage rooms shall have 26 gauge sheet metal walls and ceilings or approved alternative, fire sprinklers and must be kept clean of debris and vermin with self-closing tight fitting doors. All garbage receptacles must be tightly covered, with a sufficient number to serve the building.
9. PROPERLY MAINTAIN SECURITY PROVISIONS SUCH AS SECURITY BARS, GATES, ENTRANCE/EXIT DOORS & DOOR SELF CLOSING DEVICES: All security bars in sleeping rooms must be openable from the inside with a fully operational manual release (no keys, combination locks, or special knowledge is allowed to open security bars or gates). Absolutely no double cylinder locks (which require a key from the inside and outside) are allowed on any apartment unit or building entry or exit doors. Maintain 135-degree viewers at all apartment unit entry doors mounted no higher than 58 inches above the floor. All entrance and exit doors shall be tight fitting, self closing, and self-locking. In all apartment houses and hotels, all public bathroom, community kitchen, garbage room, roof penthouse, guest room, and dwelling unit entry doors shall be tight fitting and self-closing. No padlocks or padlock hasps are allowed on guest room or dwelling unit entry or exit doors.
10. MAINTAIN SHUTOFF TOOL NEAR GAS METER: In all apartment houses and hotels keep a shutoff tool near the gas meter and post the instructional diagram provided by the Department of Building Inspection in a public area near the gas meter.
11. MAINTAIN HEAT & HOT WATER: If your apartment house or hotel has a central heat source such as a boiler or furnace system, your heat system time clock must be set to provide heat from 5:00 AM to 11:00 AM and from 3:00 PM to 10:00 PM (13 hours



daily). Maintain all habitable rooms at 68 degrees Fahrenheit during these time periods. Your central source heat system must have a locking thermostat to initiate the heat system located in a habitable room other than an owner or manager's unit (except for an all owner occupied residential condo building). Hot water to all units must be between 105 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. For boiler heat systems, obtain annual certification per the San Francisco Plumbing Code. Radiators must be in good working order with pressure valves operational and valve shut-off handles in place.

12. MAINTAIN ALL FIREPROOFING, GLAZING, WEATHER PROOFING, EXTERIOR STUCCO, EXTERIOR SIDING, INTERIOR WALLS/ CEILINGS, and CHIMNEYS & FLUES: Maintain these areas free from holes, decay, missing materials and peeling paint.
13. MAINTAIN EXIT SIGNAGE: Common hallway doors & windows leading to fire escapes or exits must have the appropriate signage, with lettering 6 inches in height on contrasting background.
14. MAINTAIN ALL ROOF AREAS: In all apartment houses or hotels, keep all wires/ropes 8 feet above the roof. Remove all tripping hazards. All doors to roof areas must be tight fitting and self-closing and openable from inside the penthouse door leading to the roof. This door must be lockable from inside the stairway to the roof if the roof is accessible from an adjacent roof. Keep the roof area free from combustible storage. Nothing should obstruct access to a roof-mounted fire escape.
15. MAINTAIN ADEQUATE LIGHTING IN ALL PUBLIC AREAS: Provide adequate lighting to all stairs, public hallways, exit corridors and fire escapes.
16. MAINTAIN PROPER VENTILATION: In garages, penthouses, public halls, furnace and boiler rooms, gas meter rooms, garbage rooms, and all other rooms with gas appliances, maintain the proper ventilation and vent systems.
17. MAINTAIN SMOKE BARRIER DOORS: All front entry doors to the apartment house or hotel, doors that separate the garage from the public hallway or lobby, hallway doors between floors and stairways (stairway enclosure doors), boiler/furnace room doors, garbage room doors, and penthouse doors must have self closing devices and remain closed to be effective smoke barriers.
18. MAINTAIN FIRE SPRINKLERS IN GARBAGE & LINEN CHUTES: In apartment houses and hotels, maintain fire sprinklers at top and bottom of chutes, and as required by the Housing Code. Do not paint over any sprinkler heads.

19. MAINTAIN ALL LIGHT WELLS: Keep all light wells clean and free from the accumulation of debris. Keep all light well drains clean and operational.
20. MAINTAIN ALL ROOMS (VACANT OR OCCUPIED): In all residential buildings, all dwelling units and guest rooms shall be maintained in a clean and functional manner. Walls, ceilings, floors, windows, doors, lavatory sinks, and private bathrooms shall be properly maintained, weather proofed and free from severe wear, moisture retention, plumbing fixture or roof leakage, chronic and severe mold and mildew or other dilapidated conditions.
21. MAINTAIN ALL PUBLIC BATH ROOMS: In all hotels, public bathrooms must be maintained in a clean and functional manner. The San Francisco Housing Code requires a minimum of 2 operational public bathrooms per floor when all guest rooms do not have private bathrooms. This number increases by one for every additional 10-guest rooms (or increment of 10) greater than 20 guest rooms per floor. Mechanical ventilation must be capable of delivering 5 air changes per hour. Windows that provide natural ventilation shall be well maintained and fully operational.
22. MAINTAIN ALL COMMUNITY KITCHENS: In hotels, all community kitchens shall be maintained in a clean and functional manner. Approved cooking facilities must have an electrical power source. Entry doors to the community kitchen shall be self-closing and tight fitting. Counters, flooring and sinks shall be of nonabsorbent/impervious materials. Institutional grade materials such as stainless steel counters and tiled floors are recommended.
23. MAINTAIN ALL HANDRAILS & GUARDRAILS: All interior and exterior handrails and guardrails shall be properly secured and maintained in a functional manner.
24. MAINTAIN ELEVATORS REQUIRED BY THE FIRE CODE: Hotels with a building height exceeding 50 feet (as calculated by the San Francisco Fire Department) shall have at least one operating elevator for the residential occupants' use that is well maintained and operates safely.
25. MAINTAIN ADEQUATE GARBAGE PICK-UP: All residential buildings shall maintain garbage pick-up services necessary to prevent the accumulation of garbage and debris that would result in rodent harborage and unsanitary conditions.
26. MAINTAIN HOT WATER HEATERS: All hot water heaters must be properly secured and double strapped. Pressure relief valves, shut off valves and vent connectors must be properly in place and

operational. When located in a garage the appliance must be a minimum of 18 inches off the floor.

27. **MAINTAIN ALL WINDOWS:** All windows shall be well maintained, tight fitting and fully operational. Broken sash cords shall be replaced. No window shall be painted or nailed shut. Replacement windows must have sufficient weather-stripping and a minimum 20 inch width and 24 inch height if required for escape.
28. **MAINTAIN ALL FLOORING & CARPETING THROUGHOUT:** All carpeting or other floor covering shall be kept sanitized and free of extensive wear and tripping hazard. All floor coverings that cannot be sanitized shall be replaced in an appropriate manner to prevent a tripping hazard.
29. **MAINTAIN ALL MATTRESSES & LINEN:** In all hotels or guestrooms where the property owner or building operator provides mattresses and linen, these items shall be maintained in a sanitary condition and free from insect infestation.
30. **REPAIR OR REPLACE LEAKING WINDOWS, PLUMBING FIXTURES & ROOFS:** Investigate and repair leaks from windows, plumbing fixtures or the roof quickly to prevent moisture retention that can cause mold and mildew. Do not cover over leaking areas until the source of the leak is properly repaired.
31. **PROVIDE PROPER NOTIFICATION WHEN DISTURBING LEAD PAINT & OBSERVE REQUIRED REMOVAL PROTOCOLS:** Property owners need to provide residential occupants with proper notification when disturbing interior and exterior lead based paint, provide proper signage, protect interior floors/furnishings, and observe work protocols related to lead paint removal, debris containment and migration, clean-up, etc.
32. **PROPERLY VENT ALL CLOTHES DRYERS:** Moisture exhaust ducts shall be properly maintained, be equipped with a back draft damper and terminate on the outside of the building.
33. **ON SITE CARETAKER:** Apartment houses of 16 or more dwellings or hotels of 12 or more guest rooms must have an onsite caretaker that can be contacted by the city in case of emergency. The name, unit #, and contact information of this individual must be posted at the front entrance to the building.

Note: This maintenance checklist is provided for information purposes only and does not address all potential Housing Code violations that may be detected during an inspection. Please contact the Housing Inspection Services Division if you have questions about how to comply with any of the items.



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**Want a DBI Pro to brief your community / organization on permits and inspection issues? Please contact us at 415-558-6089 or [DBICommunityOutreach@sfgov.org](mailto:DBICommunityOutreach@sfgov.org) and we will make it happen.**