

EVALUATING THE SAFETY OF A NEIGHBORHOOD

How can a tenant evaluate the safety of a neighborhood prior to moving into a property? Concerns often arise when a tenant asks to break a lease after learning an area is prone to crime. However, most tenants are unaware that their landlords can hold them responsible for lost rent if the lease is broken.

What precautions can a tenant take to lessen the chance of moving into an apartment in a high-risk area? The following recommendations are provided to assist you in your search for safe housing.

- Before signing a lease for an apartment or house, drive through your neighborhood at night. See how well lighted the complex or area is, especially around apartment buildings and parking areas.
- During the daytime hours, attempt to interview fellow tenants in your building and/or neighborhood. How safe do they find the area to be? Is the management responsive to security concerns?
- Make sure to inspect your apartment before rental. Check to see that the entrance is secure – are the door and door frame sturdy? Does the front entrance have a dead-bolt lock?
- Examine your building thoroughly. Are the halls and stairwells properly lit? Pay special attention to ground floor apartments – management is not obligated to provide bars for windows, for example.
- Be sure to ask about the management's policy on entering apartments. Does the management inform the tenant in advance if staff is to enter the apartment? Inquire about the level of satisfaction other tenants have with management's actions about security issues. Do other tenants find management to be careless with apartment keys, for example? Will management change locks for you if needed?

Once you have moved into an apartment, it is wise to take the following precautions, no matter where you live.

- If you are a woman who lives alone, use only your first initial on mail boxes or in the telephone directory. Ask a male friend to program your answering machine.
- When you are away, use automatic timers for your lights and electronic equipment (radios, tvs, etc.).
- Be sure to keep an inventory of your possessions. A good suggestion is to mark your valuables for identification – engrave your driver's license identification letter followed by the letters "MD," for example.
- Carry renter's insurance. Renter's insurance not only covers your possessions, but also provides liability protection.
- Park in well-lighted areas. Be alert as you leave or approach your apartment or car.
- Make sure to know your neighbors. If possible, seek to organize an apartment block watch program in cooperation with your landlord and your local police department. Be aware, however, that some management companies do resist such activities either from a reluctance to emphasize crime, or because of the additional costs involved in making a complex more secure.

You can contact JHU Security to request a safety walk-through of your building. Call 410-516-4600 for more information.