

Healthy Housing Case Study

CITY OF TUKWILA, WA



People spend approximately 90 percent of their time indoors, with an estimated 69 percent in the home.^{i,ii} Environmental factors, such as lead and asthma triggers, originating in the home can result in poor health.ⁱⁱⁱ Quality of housing can impact people’s health: according to the National Healthy Housing Standard, “20 to 30 percent of asthma cases are linked to home environmental conditions.”^{iv} Housing is a social determinant of health and an additional leading health indicator of Healthy People 2020, a science-based 10-year agenda for improving the nation’s health.

Everyone deserves the right to a healthy home, regardless of income level, geography and lack of affordable and safe housing options. Unfortunately, the health of vulnerable populations, such as low-income communities, children and people of color, is disproportionately negatively impacted due to substandard housing.^v Additionally, low-income individuals tend to rent units and may not have sufficient means to relocate from a substandard housing unit.

As of 2015, 61 percent of Tukwila, Washington, residents rented rather than owned their properties and relied on landlords to provide healthy home environments.^{vi} Tukwila, Washington, rentals are higher than those in nearby cities — 54 percent of housing in Seattle, Washington, is rental and 43 percent of housing in King County, Washington, is rental.^{vii}

Since 2011, the Tukwila Community Development Department’s Code Enforcement Office has worked to ensure safe and healthy homes for Tukwila renters through its Rental

Housing Licensing Program. This program requires owners of residential rental properties to hold Rental Business Licenses, which must be renewed on a yearly basis, and their rental units must pass inspections every four years. The inspectors of the rental units follow a [Rental Housing Licensing Program Inspection Checklist](#), which covers such factors as conditions of windows and frames, wall surfaces and smoke detectors.^{viii}

After overcoming some resistance in its early stages, the program has come to benefit both tenants and

property owners by remediating hazards and maintaining healthy housing conditions. However, the Code Enforcement Office recognized certain challenges facing tenants and property managers, such as mold problems, that were not addressed through the Rental Housing Licensing Program and the housing code. The staff hoped to address these challenges in the next adoption of the International Property Maintenance Code — a model code governing the maintenance of existing buildings developed by the International Code



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Property owners must outline sanitation guidelines for inspections, articulate the methods used at their rental properties when an infestation is detected and document pest control service provided. Though most property owners already follow an IPM plan, some have pushed back, citing increased burden and cost.

Council. The IPMC is typically updated every three years and adopted by the Tukwila City Council.

The Tukwila Code Enforcement Office staff first learned of the National Healthy Housing Standard at a Washington State Association of Code Enforcement Conference in 2014. The NHHS “bridges the health and building code communities by putting modern public health information into housing code parlance”^{ix} and serves as a supplement to the International Property Maintenance Code. Through the conference presentation about the NHHS, code enforcement staff learned of additional evidence-based public health provisions they could incorporate into the current housing code to foster healthy home environments.

The timing of the presentation was fortuitous, as the City of Tukwila was in the process of adopting the updated IPMC. Tukwila staff approached the National Center for Healthy Housing, a national non-profit committed to healthy homes and a co-author of the NHHS, to compare the Tukwila housing code to the NHHS. After receiving the code comparison, code enforcement staff identified provisions most relevant to their work. For example, though Tukwila already worked to support healthy housing through its Rental Housing Licensing Program, the housing code did not outline how to remediate mold, which was a challenge for the city. After working with NCHH to compare its code to the NHHS, Tukwila staff integrated public

health provisions focusing on mold and pest management into its recommendation to adopt the 2015 IPMC to the City Council.

The City Council passed the ordinance to adopt the 2015 IPMC and incorporate 86 percent of public health provisions from NHHS in late 2015. Thirty-two percent of the NHHS provisions adopted were already in the IPMC (2015) and 54 percent were added as amendments to the local municipal code. To fulfill a request from the City Council and housing advocates, the Code Enforcement Office has taken a proactive approach in addressing pest infestation (such as rodents and bedbugs). For the first time this year, the Code Enforcement Office required an Integrated Pest Management plan for all multifamily rental properties with two or more dwellings.^x

Property owners must outline sanitation guidelines for inspections, articulate the methods used at their rental properties when an infestation is detected and document pest control service provided. Though most property owners already follow an IPM plan, some have pushed back, citing increased burden and cost. The Code Enforcement Office is currently working with the property owners and managers to provide guidance on the implementation and enforcement of the new requirements outlined by the IPM provision.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With support through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Cooperative Agreement #5U38OT000131-04, the American Public Health Association worked with the National Center for Healthy Housing to feature two case studies of cities that have integrated healthy housing standards into their housing ordinance. We would like to acknowledge the staff at the health agencies that provided the information essential to this report. We are grateful for their participation and willingness to share their stories. The contents of this report are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not represent any official views or endorsement by CDC. CDC funds were not used to fund the work described in the report. This report is not designed to support or defeat enactment of any legislation, pending before Congress or any state or local legislature. Federal, state, tribal and local jurisdictions apply differing rules regarding engagement with legislative bodies and other policy-related activities. Jurisdictions considering legal or other policy initiatives should seek the assistance of state or local legal counsel.