



National Consumer Protection Week: Knowledge is Power in Rental Relationships

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It's National Consumer Protection Week! The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) recognizes this annual campaign as a way to teach people about their consumer rights and to give them the tools they need to protect themselves from scams.

This week, DATCP will look at the top five consumer complaints from 2016, providing insight into the nature of the complaints and safety tips to follow throughout 2017.

Consumer Protection Week, Day Two: Landlord/Tenant

More than one million Wisconsin residents live in rental housing – most with security deposits that often equal as much as a month's rent – which means there is a significant amount of money in flux at any given time.

Therefore, it is no wonder that issues pertaining to security deposits were the leading driver of landlord/tenant complaints to the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) in 2016. DATCP received 1,121 complaints in the landlord/tenant category last year, second only to telemarketing.

After security deposits, consumer complaints focused on unauthorized entry, inadequate disclosures and evictions. Some basics to know about these subjects:

Unauthorized entry: Unless there is an emergency, a landlord must give 12-hours advance notice before entering a unit.

Inadequate disclosures: Your best protection as a new tenant is to complete a check-in sheet detailing the condition of the unit and appliances and return it to the landlord within the first seven days of your tenancy. Provide photo evidence of any deficiencies to the landlord and keep a copy for your own records. If you fail to complete the check-in sheet, you may be giving up your right to contest some security deposit withholdings for pre-existing conditions.

Evictions: Tenants who pay partial rent, no rent, or late rent (even one day late) put themselves at risk of eviction, as do tenants who break the rules or terms of the rental agreement or cause damage. Tenants may be given either a written five-day or 14-day notice to vacate the property.

Landlord/tenant disputes are often grounded in a misunderstanding of each party's rights under state law. The keys to a productive and respectful landlord/tenant relationship are to keep an open dialogue, review and understand the rental agreement, and stay educated on each party's rights.

To help both parties understand their rights relating to residential laws, DATCP offers two resources on rental issues that both landlords and tenants should have available for instant access:

- The [Tenants' Rights and Responsibilities fact sheet](#) is a quick look at a wide range of factors involved in a tenancy agreement,
- The [Landlord/Tenant Guide](#) is a comprehensive reference covering many more issues in detail.

Both documents are available for free on the DATCP website or by contacting the Consumer Protection Hotline at 800-422-7128 or via email: datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov.

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