



## City of Carter Lake – Rental Housing Inspection Program

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

September 2019

#### **How does the city define what is a rental property?**

The Administrative Policy defines it as, “Any structure that includes a dwelling unit that is being held out or offered for rent or is currently being let for rent and occupied by any person who is not the owner of the premises.” Basically, if any portion of a home is being rented out (for cash or other services), then it is a rental property and needs to be registered. Excluded are hotels, dormitories, long-term care, medical facilities, and church parsonages or other similar religious facilities.

#### **How does the city define rent?**

The Administrative Policy defines it as, “Any form of payment, including but not limited to cash, services, or other valuable considerations, provided as a condition of occupying a dwelling not owned by the occupant.”

#### **What if I own a home that my child (or parent) lives in, they take care of the property, but they do not pay any rent? Does that property need to be registered?**

No, regular upkeep, maintenance, and utilities of a home are not considered rent. If the person living in the home is required to do other extra services (e.g. build an addition or maintain other properties, in exchange for living in the home) then it would be considered a rental.

#### **If the person living in the home that I own pays the property taxes and/or property insurance on the home, is that considered rent?**

Yes. The property is an asset of the property owner, therefore, property taxes and property insurance are the responsibility of the property owner. Paying property taxes and/or property insurance on behalf of the property owner is considered rent. This does not apply to renters’ insurance.

#### **What if I put the house that I live in and own into a trust? Is it considered a rental?**

If you control the trust or entity that legally owns the home, then no, it’s not considered a rental. If you do not control the trust or entity that owns the home and you pay some form of rent (which included property taxes and property insurance), then it is considered a rental property.

#### **When do I need to register my property?**

Each owner or operator of rental property shall register such rental property with the building official. Each rental dwelling unit shall be registered annually. A registration is effective from January 1st until and including the December 31st immediately following. A registration that is set to expire must be renewed for the next annual registration period no later than December 31st of the current period, though such renewal cannot be sought or granted sooner than December 1st of the current period.

#### **Do I have to have a separate registration form for each rental property?**

Yes, each property requires a registration form; however, a property with multiple units will only need one registration form. For example, an apartment building with four units would still only need a single registration form. Another example would be a landlord who owns four single-family rental homes, which would all need their own registration form.

#### **Who do I pay for the registration fee?**

Registration fees will be paid to the City of Carter Lake. To help get the program started registration fee has been waived for 2019-2021. Starting December 1, 2022 the registration fee will be **\$30.00 per** unit per year.

The fee is paid at the time of registration to cover the duration of the Compliance Certificate - most properties are on a three-year inspection cycle. So a single-family home would have a **\$90 registration** fee. Note: this is not the same as the inspection fee, which is addressed below.

**Where do I need to submit my registration forms and fees?**

Registration forms and fees need to be submitted to City Hall at 950 E. Locust Street. Forms and fees can be delivered in person, or submitted by mail.

**Where do I need to have smoke alarms installed?**

One smoke alarm must be installed inside each bedroom. One smoke alarm must be installed outside the bedrooms in the nearby vicinity (e.g. in the hallway where the bedrooms are located). At least one smoke alarm must be installed on each floor. They all must be within one foot of the ceiling.

**The inspection checklist says I only have to have a carbon monoxide detector if there is a potential source of carbon monoxide. What are considered carbon monoxide sources?**

Any natural gas burning appliance is a potential carbon monoxide source. This would include (but not limited to) gas stoves, gas furnaces, gas water heaters, gas ovens/ranges, and gas fireplaces. The other common potential source is an attached garage. If the property is all electric and there is no attached garage, then no carbon monoxide detectors are needed.

**Where do I need to have carbon monoxide detectors installed?**

One carbon monoxide detector must be located outside the bedrooms in the nearby vicinity (e.g. in the hallway where the bedrooms are located). At least one carbon monoxide detector must be installed on each floor.

**For locations where both a fire alarm and carbon monoxide detector is required, can I use a combined unit?**

Yes, as long as it has both the fire alarm and carbon monoxide detector, it will be acceptable.

**Does the smoke alarm need to be dual sensor (photoelectric and ionization)?**

No, a single sensor smoke alarm is acceptable; however, the Fire Chief and the Building Official strongly recommend that landlords take advantage of the opportunity and go with the dual sensor if they are purchasing new smoke alarms. It's added safety for little additional cost.

**Can carbon monoxide detectors be the plug-in type?**

Yes, plug-in carbon monoxide detectors are acceptable.

**What type of fire extinguisher do I need?**

For rental properties with two or more units, the extinguisher must be a minimum of 2-A:10B:C. All of these fire extinguishers require regular inspection and maintenance, which is monthly visual inspections and an annual maintenance check by a certified person.

For single-family rental homes need to have a minimum of 1-A:5B:C extinguisher maintained/replaced according to the manufacturer's instructions. Typically, this means ensuring that the extinguisher does not have any noticeable leaks or visible powder around the nozzle, and that the indicator is in the "green." For a single-family home, this can be conducted by the landlord.

**On a multi-family property, do I have to have a fire extinguisher inside each unit?**

No, in buildings where there are multiple units fire extinguishers can be located in common hallways. However, a fire extinguisher must be located on each floor, and the front door of each unit must be within 75 feet of a fire extinguisher.

**Where does ownership or property management contact information need to be posted?**

Contact information needs to be easily accessible on one of the main living floors. Basically, if the tenant needs to contact the landlord for some reason, they need to know where they can find the necessary contact information.

**When do bedrooms require an egress window?**

All bedrooms require an operable egress window. Small basement windows or windows that do not open, for example, are not sufficient.

**In what situations do I need to have a fire escape?**

Any bedrooms or rental units above the second floor require a full fire escape. This must be a permanent fire escape structure. It cannot be a rope ladder or some other temporary means of escape.

Bedrooms and units on the second story must have an operable window that can be easily opened through which a full grown adult can pass through.

**Are plug-in floor lamps sufficient to meet the requirement for proper illumination, or do I need to install overhead lighting?**

Plug-in floor lamps are acceptable, as long as they are safe. If the room has functioning outlets in good condition, no additional overhead lighting is required.

**Does my property need to have air conditioning?**

No, air conditioning is not a requirement. However, providing proper heating that is capable of keeping the living areas at 68 degrees during the winter is required.

**How will I know when my property will be inspected?**

Each property will be inspected sometime within the first three years of the program. At the beginning of each month, the City of Carter Lake will pull from the registration database a list of properties to be inspected that month. City staff will mail a notice to the property owner or manager of each property notifying them of the upcoming inspection appointment. All appointments are scheduled through City staff.

**What is the cost the inspection?**

If after the first inspection a rental property is deemed to be out of compliance, a list of deficiencies shall be provided to the owner or operator with a stipulated time frame in which to make the repairs. Upon completion of the repairs, the owner or operator shall schedule a no-charge re-inspection of the rental property to confirm compliance. If the building official finds at that time that the repairs have not been completed successfully, the owner or operator shall be required to pay the re-inspection fee of **\$300.00** for the third inspection and **\$400.00** if the fourth inspection is required.

**Who do I pay for the re-inspection?**

An invoice will be mailed with the notice of re-inspection and payment for the inspection will be paid directly to the City of Carter Lake. Note: this is not the same as the registration fee, which is addressed above.

**What verification do I receive once my property passes the inspection?**

After passing the inspection, City staff will mail a Certificate of Compliance which is effective for three years.