

CONWAY HOUSING AUTHORITY

BED BUG POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Bed bugs are a growing problem on a national level, and as such, Conway Housing Authority (CHA) has developed this policy for the Housing Choice Voucher program. The purpose of this policy is to establish roles and responsibilities for landlords, participants and CHA to minimize the potential for bed bugs and to provide guidance in cases where bed bugs are present to eliminate them as quickly as possible, and provide guidelines when a move is required.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is important to define roles and responsibilities of each party (landlord, participant, and CHA) to prevent delay and to work effectively towards the elimination of bed bugs. Given that bed bugs are a growing problem and that they are difficult to contain without proper treatment, it is imperative that all parties work together towards a common goal. If bed bugs are left untreated they can spread throughout a residence affecting current and future residents.

Landlord Roles and Responsibilities:

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract requires the landlord to maintain the contract unit and its premises in accordance with Housing Quality Standards (HQS). It is the landlord's responsibility, as stated in the HQS (24CFR982.401), to ensure the dwelling unit is in sanitary condition and free of vermin and rodent infestation. If the presence of bed bugs is suspected, the landlord must notify CHA immediately. CHA's Inspectors are not certified in the identification of bed bugs. When notified by a landlord or participant that bed bugs are present or suspected, CHA will fail the unit under HQS requirements, therefore, it is strongly recommended that the landlord contact an extermination professional for an immediate inspection. If treatment is deemed necessary, the landlord should provide CHA, within 48 hours of the initial determination that treatment is required, a copy of the contract between the landlord and the extermination professional.

Once treatment is complete, the landlord must certify to CHA, the date the unit was treated, the type of treatment used, whether or not the participant completed any required pre-treatment activities and cooperated with the landlord and the extermination professional, and whether or not follow-up or additional treatments were recommended by the extermination professional. This certification from the landlord must be provided to CHA no more than 72 hours after treatment of the unit, and must include documentation from the extermination professional. CHA will not pass the unit under HQS until this certification form is received.

If the landlord fails to comply with the above requirements, it will be considered a violation of the HAP contract and may result in abatement of the rent, termination of the HAP contract, and/or a decision made to deny the landlord further participation in the Housing Choice Voucher program.

Tenant Roles and Responsibilities:

Part C of the HAP Contract (Tenancy Addendum) is part of the lease between the landlord and the tenant, and specifies that grounds for termination of tenancy by the owner include living or housekeeping habits that cause damage to the unit or premises. If bed bugs are suspected, it is the participant's responsibility to notify the landlord and CHA immediately in order to minimize the spread of the possible infestation. It is also the responsibility of the participant to cooperate with the landlord and any extermination professional to ensure the successful elimination of bed bugs. Cooperation means allowing inspections and treatments, and performing any housekeeping or cleaning tasks requested by the landlord or professional, and necessary for effective treatment. In the event the participant fails to report bed bugs or admits responsibility for the infestation, they may be charged by the landlord for costs to exterminate.

The participant should notify CHA that treatment has been completed and that they have complied with any/all requirements within 72 hours of treatment.

If the participant fails to comply with the above requirements, treatment requirements, or is otherwise negligent in causing or perpetuating an infestation, they may be held liable for the HQS fail, which will be considered a serious or repeated lease violation or non-compliance with program requirements, and may result in termination of their Housing Choice Voucher assistance.

CHA Roles and Responsibilities:

In the administration of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program, it is CHA's responsibility to inspect the unit before initial occupancy, at least annually, and at other times when CHA determines that an inspection is necessary. CHA will ensure the landlord maintains the assisted unit within HQS guidelines and provide guidance on the resolution of any potential bed bug problems. CHA may not make any HAP payments to the landlord on a unit that does not meet HQS, unless the owner corrects the deficiency within the specified timeframe.

CHA believes that educating landlords and participants is an important part of the process in preventing and eliminating bed bugs. CHA will include a Bed Bug Information Sheet for Landlords in each Landlord Packet that is distributed. Additional copies of the information sheet will be available at all Landlord Workshops. CHA will also include a Bed Bug Information Sheet for Tenants in their Briefing Packet. Additional copies of the information sheet will be available upon request.

CHA will provide landlords and participants with a copy of this policy and the Bed Bug Information Sheets when notified of the presence of bed bugs. In the event that relocation is necessary, CHA will provide landlords and participants with a copy of this policy and the Bed Bug Information Sheets when notified of the presence of bed bugs. In the event that relocation is necessary, CHA will inform the participant of the precautions required in order to minimize the transfer of bed bugs to a new unit. The participant must follow these precautions and requirements.

CHA will take action against a landlord or participant for non-compliance with the above requirements. This action may include abatement of HAP, termination of HAP to the landlord, termination of assistance to the participant, and penalties for future participation in the program.

RELOCATION POLICY

If the participant notifies the landlord of the presence of bed bugs and the landlord fails to take action within a reasonable period of time, the participant should notify CHA. CHA may issue the participant a voucher to relocate if it is deemed necessary and appropriate. Prior to relocation, CHA will meet with the participant and review the necessary steps to ensure that bed bugs are not transferred to the new unit. These include:

1. Remove all sheets, blankets, mattress covers, pillow cases, etc, from the beds. Wash them in hot water and dry in the clothes dryer on the highest heat setting for at least 30 minutes. The items should then be folded and placed in plastic garbage bags and sealed tightly. They should not be put back on the beds until the move is complete.
2. Wash all clothing, toys, towels, and other linens in hot water and dry in the clothes dryer on the highest setting for at least 30 minutes. Clean items should be placed in an airtight plastic storage bin or plastic garbage bags that are sealed tightly and stored until the move is complete.
3. Vacuum (use disposable vacuum bags) all furniture, dresser drawers, night stand drawers, mattresses, and box springs. Place the disposable vacuum bag inside a plastic bag, seal tightly, and discard in an outdoor trash receptacle immediately.
4. It is suggested, but not required, to purchase special bed bug mattress and box spring encasements and place on all mattresses and box springs. These encasements can be an effective bed bug killer, but must be left on all mattresses and box springs for at least one year.
5. Discard, or have all infested furniture professionally treated by a licensed exterminator. If the participant chooses to keep the furniture and have it treated, CHA may request proof of treatment prior to relocating.

The participant must certify to CHA in writing that the above mentioned steps have been completed.

If the participant does not comply with their responsibilities, or does not cooperate with the landlord in treatment of bed bug issues, CHA will not authorize relocation to a new unit and may terminate assistance to the family for non-compliance with program requirements.

If the participant is relocated and bed bugs reappear in the new unit, the participant may be responsible to the landlord for the cost of an extermination professional to treat the new unit. If it is determined that the participant did not follow the necessary steps to ensure that bed bugs were not transferred to the new unit, or falsely certified the completion of these steps, CHA may terminate assistance to the participant for non-compliance of program requirements.