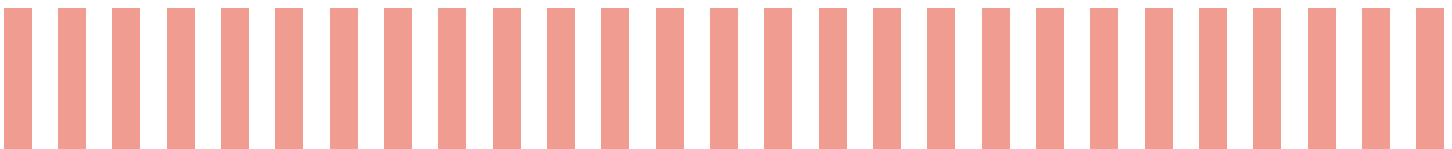


RENTSAFE TORONTO

A STATUS REPORT



November 2019



ACORN'S FIGHT

WINNING RENTSAFE TORONTO

Toronto ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is an independent national organization of low and moderate income families with 20,000 members in every corner of the city. ACORN believes that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a city-wide membership who are invested in their organization and focused on building community power for change.

Since our inception in 2004 in York South Weston, our membership has been pushing property owners, management companies, and the City of Toronto Municipal Licensing and Standards Division to ensure that all Toronto tenant families have basic health and safety standards upheld in their rent-ed homes. In 2008, the City of Toronto introduced the Multi Residential Apartment Buildings (MRAB) Audit program. While the introduction of MRAB has proved that proactive enforcement does improve the conditions in Toronto's rental communities, because of remedial powers and financial resources alongwith inadequate overall program budget size, MRAB failed to address the wide range of issues tenants faced.



In 2014, ACORN members collected 2700 property standards violations from Toronto tenants. And in November 2014, we delivered our message to Mayor John Tory and to Municipal Licensing and Standards Division, which helped reinitiate the conversation on ensuring that the city takes steps to create healthy and livable housing.

During the period that the Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) was holding consultations around licensing rental apartment buildings, ACORN did the "State of Repair" survey between August 15th and October 18th 2016, with 174 low- and moderate-income families, most of who were ACORN members. The survey was designed to understand the state of repair in the apartment buildings, experience of tenants in getting repairs done from their landlords, experience in

getting help from the City, and the extent to which they found the MRAB program helpful.





“State of Repair” 2016 What did the tenants say then?

95% of respondents reported living with a violation of municipal property standards

69.5% of respondents said that repairs were needed in their units on the day they moved in

29% of tenants felt threatened when making complaints about conditions in their apartments

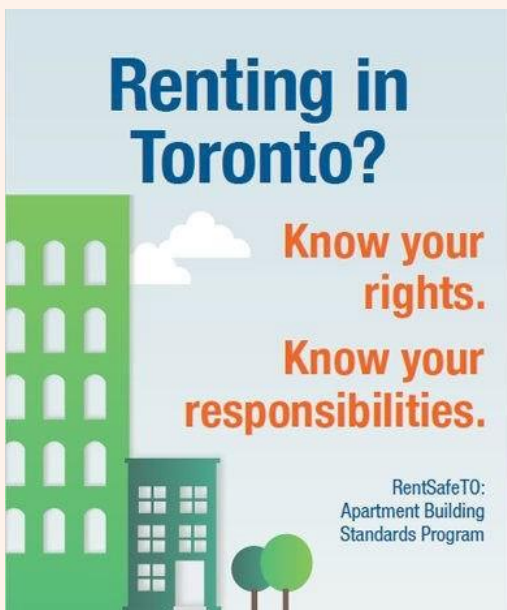
One-third of those surveyed said they saw no point in calling 311, despite being aware of their rights and the laws in place to protect them.

Only four respondents reported that an MRAB audit improved conditions in their building

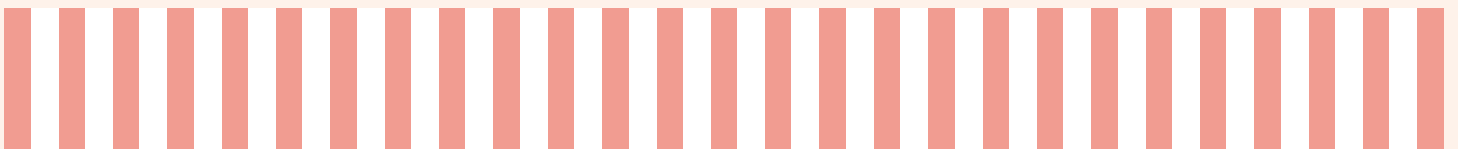
**City of Toronto voted for RentSafe in 2016
City Bylaw (City of Toronto Municipal Code
Chapter 354) in March 2017**

RENTSAFE TORONTO

TENANTS' RIGHTS



- ⇒ A Bylaw enforcement program that ensures apartment building owners comply with building maintenance standards.
- ⇒ Applies to apartment buildings with three or more storeys and 10 or more units.
- ⇒ A Tenant Notification Board accessible to all tenants.
- ⇒ Building owners/operators to maintain a capital plan for building repairs and keeping service and maintenance logs
- ⇒ Maintain a process for receiving and tracking tenant service requests - Urgent Request to be responded within 24 hours and others to be responded within 7 days.
- ⇒ Fulfill all record keeping obligations.
- ⇒ Inspections by the City at every apartment building at least once every three years.
- ⇒ A report of the inspection findings and a building evaluation score provided to the owner.
- ⇒ If property owners do not follow the regulations in the Apartment Building Bylaw or other applicable bylaws, general fines can be issued.



RENTSAFE TORONTO

WHAT'S THE STATUS NOW?

ACORN conducted an online survey of low- and moderate-income tenants to assess the implementation of RentSafe program. A total of 107 respondents filled out the survey, most of who are ACORN members.

Here is what we found:

- ⇒ 54% respondents still have never heard about the RentSafe program.
- ⇒ Out of 46% people who knew about RentSafe, one-third came to know about it because they were active ACORN members.
- ⇒ 46% respondents did not have a Tenant Notification Board.
- ⇒ Majority of them (64%) said they don't know if their building has had a RentSafe audit. Only 9% said that they have had an audit. Few of them said they didn't know what an audit is.
- ⇒ Moreover, most of them were not satisfied with the repairs post audit.
- ⇒ 60% respondents stated that they needed repairs when they first moved into their units.

ROCAHES, BUGS AND MORE...

- ◆ One-third tenants reported seeing cockroaches every day.
 - ◆ 34% reported having bed bugs in the last two years.
- ◆ 70% tenants reported too much heat in summer and too cold in winter
- ◆ 30% reported issues with their appliances—functional but too old.
- ◆ Half of them mentioned that they had problems with hot water.
- ◆ More than half stated that their flooring needed replacement.
- ◆ Lack of security and cleanliness emerged as top concerns in common areas.

Despite these wide range of issues

- ◆ 46% tenants felt the building management did not treat them fairly.
- ◆ Half of them felt that the building management did not act professionally
- ◆ 42% of them felt that the maintenance or contract workers did quality work sometimes and 20% felt they rarely did any quality repairs.
- ◆ 36% reported that they felt threatened in getting repairs done.
 - ◆ On third people don't think there is any point calling 311.
- ◆ 21% respondents stated that they never submit work orders as they don't see any point doing so, while 21% submit them yearly and 19% submit them monthly.
- ◆ 66% people faced problems in getting repairs done in the past 2 years
 - ◆ Only 30% said that they get their repairs done in a timely manner.

ISSUES IN TENANTS' UNITS CHECKLIST

ISSUES	HOW MANY REPORTED (%)
√ Peeling paint on walls or ceiling	44
√ Holes/cracks on walls or ceiling	43
√ Ventilation problems in bathroom or kitchen	50
√ Kitchen or closet shelves damaged or broken	30
√ Electric sockets broken or don't work	26
√ Cockroaches	52
√ Too hot in summer	39
√ Too cold in winter	20
√ Mold	34
√ Leaky faucets	26
√ Drafty windows	31
√ Unfinished repairs	30

Note: People were asked to check all that apply.

TENANT TESTIMONIALS

HOW DO TENANTS FEEL?

“TOO LONG TO DESCRIBE!”

“Suffice to say that RentSafe T0's April 2019 building audit noted forty-two (42) actionable deficiencies at Wilson Park Road and maybe three of them have been rectified. I could go on at encyclopaedic length about the risks and

“NO PROFESSIONALISM”

“Heating is the biggest issue, shower water keeps fluctuating either too cold or too hot, building management very un professional including the owner of the building who is a bully, never provides with any updates and no professionalism”

“The landlord has raised the rent above the legal limit in the past and it was difficult to get the money back/rent lowered (had to go to the LTB even though the City was the one who notified me). The garbage area in the back parking lot is filthy (open bins, garbage blowing out) and I don't believe anything gets recycled because there is a lot of garbage thrown into the bins as well”.

“Owner is extremely slow and stubborn to authorize property manager to spend money to do necessary work. In my 25 years here, quality of management of property has declined significantly. I am stuck here due to limited finances to find another place to live at a reasonable price...He wants higher rents, but will only get when a tenant moves out. Still, he won't spend \$\$ necessary for quality repairs that would bring in new tenant for "market" rent. Becoming a lose-lose situation”.

“We have had to throw away most of our furniture due to 6 months of bedbugs, we are sleeping on an air mattress and getting eaten alive. Building Management don't fix the problem and blame me. They are not helpful, are rude and demeaning”.

with new leases”.

“Superintendents supposedly have no authority to approve most work orders and the old tenants are being pushed out to make room for new high paying tenants

“Management is very rude and threatening especially to people with language barrier. Try to evict people who speak out. Pipe break and flooded my apt and no empathy. Will have to find Hundreds of \$\$\$\$ to wash all the blankets that have been used to suction water from the floor. Cannot use stove for fear of electrical problems due to water getting into the plugs. Have to order food everyday. No Compensation from SLUMLORD. WE NEED THE CITY TO INTERVENE”.

MAKING RENTSAFE WORK

ACORN members hailed the passing of the City bylaw (RentSafe) as their victory since it meant ensuring greater landlord accountability. It was only after years of persistent struggle that Toronto ACORN won RentSafe. However, as the findings reveal, the program has not been implemented to its full potential. The fact that few people are aware of RentSafe to begin with, many buildings still do not have a tenant notification board and several buildings have not had a RentSafe Audit — all reinforce the need to implement the program in its true spirit.

Based on the survey findings and ACORN's work, here is a list of questions that need to be addressed:

- ⇒ **Lack of awareness:** Many tenants don't know about RentSafe, 311, or their rights. Or they don't believe the city will do anything.
- ⇒ **Inspection protocol is not transparent:** The program saw more than 6000 complaints, but how many fines were issued? What happens when 311 is called? Why were only 300 orders issued on these complaints, and 100 convictions. What is the protocol for remedial action? Tenants don't understand why they should call 311. We know what happens if we park for 2 hours in a 1 hour spot – what happens when a landlord takes 3 months to fix a boiler? There is either too much discretion of the property inspector involved, or the protocol is not working towards making sure tenants have healthy homes and property standards are followed.
- ⇒ **Inspection criteria are not exhaustive:** Many bad buildings got passed, only 11 required audits in 2018. This seems like a problem of inspection rather than all buildings being healthy.
- ⇒ **No penalties for inaction:** How many tickets were written since RentSafe was created. Why is there no administrative monetary penalties despite 2 years of work? There are no penalties for landlords that don't keep up with repairs.
- ⇒ **Inadequate capacity and budgets:** How many inspectors have been hired? How many currently work on RentSafeTO? Why did it take two years for a single report to come out? We appreciate the hard work of city staff, but do you have enough staff to do the work?



Here's HOW

- ✓ **PUBLIC FACING SIGN:** On the front door, Just like DineSafe. We need visible, bold lettering letting tenants know their rights, how to get help and the evaluation of the building.
- ✓ **TRANSPARENCY:** Municipal Licensing & Standards must be transparent about their protocol for inspection of buildings.
- ✓ **TENANT ENGAGEMENT:** We need greater tenant engagement, tenants need to know that this program is for them and it works!
- ✓ **EVALUATION CRITERIA:** RentSafe needs to expand it's inspection criteria to include pests, mould, roofs, and other requirements of the RentSafe bylaw.
- ✓ **ENFORCEMENT:** The cost of not maintaining the building needs to be higher than the cost of repairs – otherwise tenants will continue to pay with their health and lives. There needs to be financial penalty on landlords for inaction. We need administrative monetary penalties, charged to the landlords upfront, for inaction.
- ✓ **CAPACITY:** The City needs to ensure that it has adequate staff and budget to implement the program properly.