

STATE OF REPAIR REPORT



Results of Toronto ACORN's Tenant
Survey & Recommendations for RentSafeTO



Pictured: Tenants at 500 Dawes Road speak out against building conditions on July 22, 2025.

TORONTO ACORN
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 www.acorncanada.org/toronto

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INTRODUCTION



From the skyrocketing costs of rent to terrible slum conditions, tenants in the City of Toronto are bearing the brunt of a serious housing crisis. According to the most recent census data, 48% of Torontonians rent their homes, and many of them are low-income (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Toronto ACORN has conducted “State of Repair” surveys in 2016, 2019, 2023, and now in 2026 that capture the issues tenants are facing in Toronto’s apartment buildings. Since the introduction of the City’s RentSafeTO: Apartment Building Standards Program in 2017, these surveys have also served to assess the extent to which this program is delivering for tenants.

From January 15, 2026 to March 5, 2026, Toronto ACORN’s Tenant Survey was open. It collected 339 responses. The results of this survey paint a picture of substandard living conditions in Toronto’s aging apartment stock. In April, City Council will have an opportunity to strengthen property standards enforcement and give RentSafeTO teeth. We hope this report encourages them to seize it.

What is ACORN?

The **Toronto Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)** is a part of ACORN Canada, a mass membership organization structured like a union for the community, with over 190,000 low- and moderate-income members nationwide. Across the city, we have neighbourhood ACORN chapters organizing in Rexdale, York West, Weston, Downtown Toronto, East York, and Scarborough.

THE HEALTHY HOMES CAMPAIGN

Campaign History

Since Toronto ACORN's founding in 2004 in Weston, ACORN members have been pushing property owners, property management companies, and the City of Toronto to ensure that all Toronto renters have basic health and safety standards upheld in their homes. We originally called for **Landlord Licensing**.

What is Landlord Licensing?

ACORN members have long pointed out that in the City of Toronto, you need a license to operate a hot dog cart, but not to be a landlord. Toronto ACORN's original proposal for Landlord Licensing included:

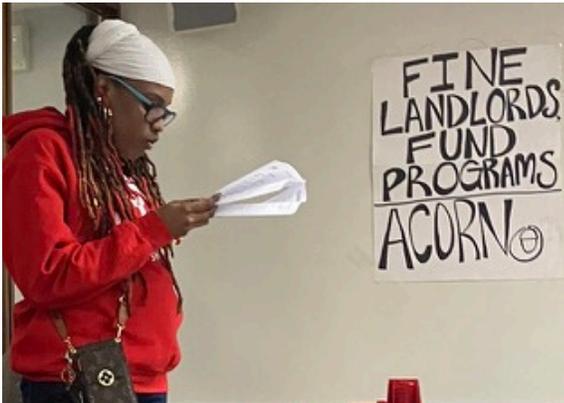
- A mandatory landlord licensing system maintained by the City;
- Proactive apartment inspections by City inspectors would identify violations of the City's Property Standards Bylaw and would issue fines and penalties against the offending landlord;
- A robust tenant outreach and engagement program to enable City inspectors to inspect inside tenants' units;
- A clear display in a conspicuous place, outlining violations identified during the City inspection (similar to DineSafe in restaurants);
- A City-managed rent escrow account that tenants can pay their rent into, if the landlord fails an inspection and subsequently loses their license;
- Remedial action by the City to address the violations, using the money in the rent escrow account to cover the costs of remedial action; and
- Full cost recovery by charging landlords an annual per-unit fee for every rental unit on their property.

In 2004, the City Council resolved to support Landlord Licensing in principle, but claimed that provincial legislation prevented them from enacting it. After the passage of the *City of Toronto Act, 2006*, the City of Toronto was empowered to enact such a system, and ACORN's first push at City Council for Landlord



Licensing came in 2007 when Councillor Anthony Perruzza moved a motion asking for a licensing regime, after he was elected on a campaign to license landlords.

Consultations with FMTA, ACORN, and other groups got underway in March 2007. In November 2008, the City launched the Multi-unit Residential Apartment Building (MRAB) program, which proactively audited a small number of buildings in each ward, at first on a pilot basis before transitioning to annual audits.



By 2010, MRAB was targeting 200 buildings per year, but there was a lack of adequate staffing, and the costs of the program were paid for by the public, rather than the landlords. Motions made by Councillor Janet Davis in 2010 to move to a licensing program on a cost recovery model were shot down.



In 2014, ACORN and allies relaunched our campaign for landlord licensing. In 2015, ACORN members worked with Councillor Josh Matlow on the Licensing and Standards Committee to successfully move MRAB to a cost recovery model, along with better tenant engagement and tougher enforcement.



Continuously engaging with the City, holding protests and actions at apartment buildings, and organizing tenants in key wards, ACORN was able to move discussions at City Hall back to a licensing

regime for all landlords on a cost recovery model.

By May 2016, we had brought together a broad coalition of Councillors, and ACORN members and our allies were deputing to the Tenant Issues Committee and winning motions that would move any proposed program closer to the demands of tenants' organizations. That November, Toronto ACORN released our first State of Repair Report, in which 95% of survey respondents reported living with a violation of municipal property standards (Toronto ACORN, 2016).

Then in 2017, RentSafeTO—an apartment building registration program—was adopted by City Council, with only one councillor voting against. While it was not landlord licensing, it did include many of the components ACORN members and allies had fought for (Toronto ACORN, 2023).

What is RentSafeTO?

RentSafeTO is a bylaw enforcement program to ensure that building owners comply with maintenance standards under the Property Standards Bylaw. It applies to all residential rental units, public and private, in a building with 3 or more storeys and 10 or more units. The owners of these buildings are required to register for the program and renew annually (City of Toronto, 2026a).

These buildings are subject to regular evaluations by bylaw officers at least once every two years. During evaluations, officers inspect common areas, mechanical and security systems, parking, exterior grounds, and building records (City of Toronto, 2026a).

The results of these evaluations are translated into a score out of 100%, and these results are publicly available on an interactive map on the City's website (City of Toronto, 2026a).

Landlords are also required to maintain a process for receiving and tracking tenant service requests, also known as work orders. These must be responded to within 7 days—with the exception of urgent matters of heat, water, and electricity, which must be responded to within 24 hours. Building operators must also maintain a capital plan for building repairs and keeping service and maintenance logs, and a Tenant Notification Board accessible to all tenants where the most recent evaluations results are posted. (City of Toronto, 2026a).



In addition to proactive evaluations, tenants can also call the Municipal Licensing and Standards department via 311 to report violations of the Property Standards Bylaw. In other words, if your kitchen sink is leaking and your landlord hasn't done anything in over a week, you can contact the City and they'll send a bylaw officer to inspect the sink—and they're empowered to issue orders to fix it, and fines for failing to comply.



The Fight To Give RentSafeTO Teeth

The RentSafeTO program today has come a long way since 2017, thanks to the organizing of ACORN and allies.



Beginning in 2023, tenants showed up in numbers to the annual City Budget consultations advocating for more bylaw officers to investigate tenant complaints. Mayor Olivia Chow's 2026 City Budget supported 60 bylaw officers and 13 support staff for the RentSafeTO program. In comparison, there were just 36 officers in 2023, responsible for the more than 3500 apartment buildings registered with the program (RentSafeTO, 2024, 2025).



After years of tenants pushing for DineSafe-style colour-coded evaluation signs to be displayed prominently in apartment buildings, and a temporary defeat at City Council on the issue in 2020, a motion was successfully passed in 2025 by Councillor Josh Matlow and Mayor Olivia Chow directing City staff to implement a colour-

coded signage system by no later than July 31, 2026. (Municipal Licensing and Standards, 2025). Other allies like Councillor Paula Fletcher were also instrumental in improving the RentSafeTO program.

In July 2025, ACORN brought Mayor Chow on a tour of 500 Dawes Road, one of Toronto’s most notorious rental buildings. After the tour, she vowed to push for remedial action on bad apartment buildings, so that the City will step in to do repairs when the landlord refuses to, and then put the bill on the landlord’s property taxes. The City of Toronto has the power to do remedial action on private property under provincial legislation. But its never been used to compel landlords to do maintenance in apartment buildings, and therefore doesn’t have the framework of *how* to do this work. (Rider, 2025; Weingarten, 2026).

The City took the landlord to court, and won. This month, the appeal period ended, and Mayor Chow has introduced a motion to crack down on bad landlords. It includes direction to immediately begin remedial action at 500 Dawes Road and learn from the experience. It directs staff to better collaborate across divisions, including a cross-divisional database of investigations and enforcement activities at rental properties. And it proposes investigating all of a landlord’s rental properties if they have a history of repeated infractions (Weingarten, 2026).

It is in this context that we release this report. Next week, City Council will consider the mayor’s motion. In April 2026, a much anticipated report from Municipal Licensing and Standards on a comprehensive reform of RentSafeTO—including a new remedial action framework—is expected to be presented to City Council. We hope this report will inform staff and Council alike of what tenants are asking they protect: safe and healthy homes for **all**.



TENANT SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Toronto ACORN's Tenant Survey was open online from January 15 to March 5, 2026. 339 responses were received. 21 were identified as duplicates and were subsequently filtered out of quantitative responses. All responses came from postal codes within the City of Toronto. Similar to previous surveys, the three focus areas were:

- What is the state of repair in the apartment building you live in?
- What has been your experience getting repairs done from your landlord?
- What has been your experience getting help from the City to get repairs done?

In addition, the survey also asked respondents for their input on how to improve the RentSafeTO program. The targeted demographic for respondents were low and moderate income tenants across Toronto. The survey was promoted via:

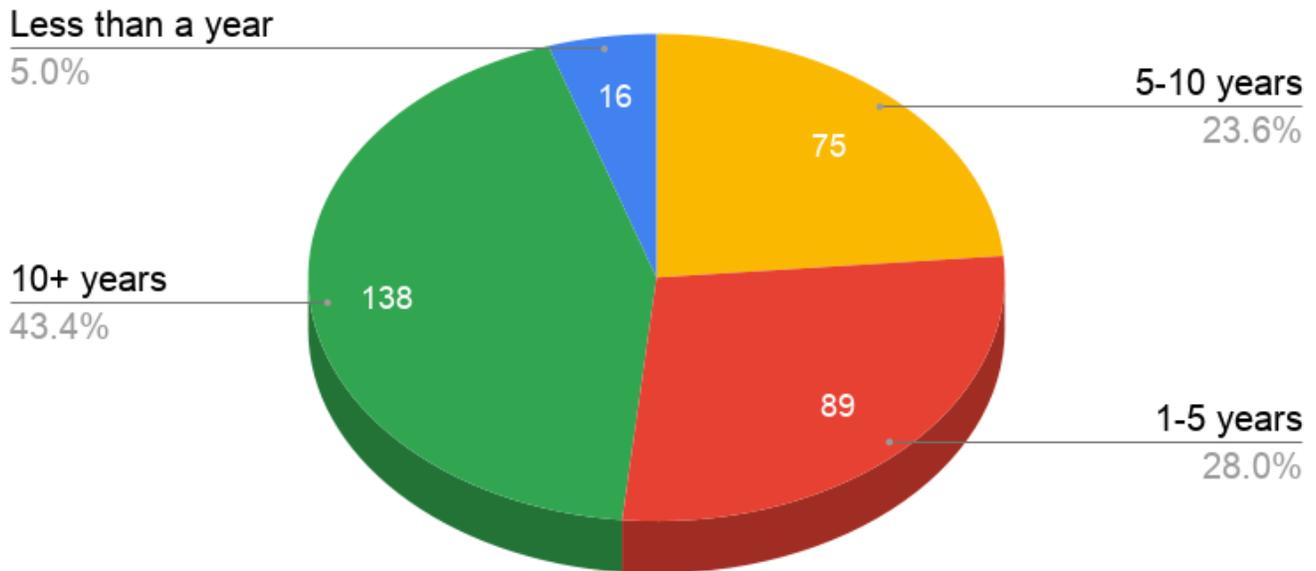
- Doorknocking in apartment buildings across the city;
- ACORN neighbourhood chapter meetings;
- Tenant meetings in building lobbies and laundry rooms;
- Tabling and flyering in our communities;
- Emails to our membership list; and
- Social media

TENANT SURVEY RESULTS

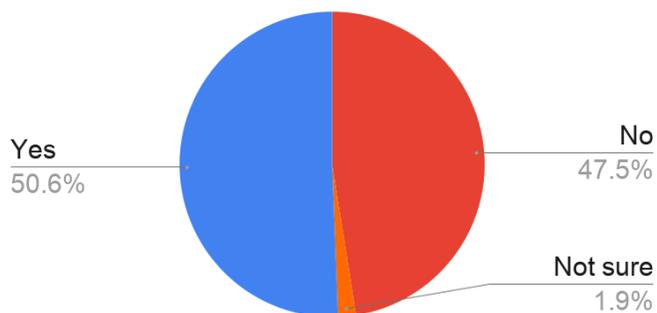
Landlord, Tenancy, Rent & Utilities

Two-thirds of survey respondents are long-term tenants, with 23.6% having lived in their place between 5 and 10 years and another 43.4% living in their homes for over a decade.

How long have you lived in your current apartment?



Do you pay for electricity (hydro) separate from your monthly rent?

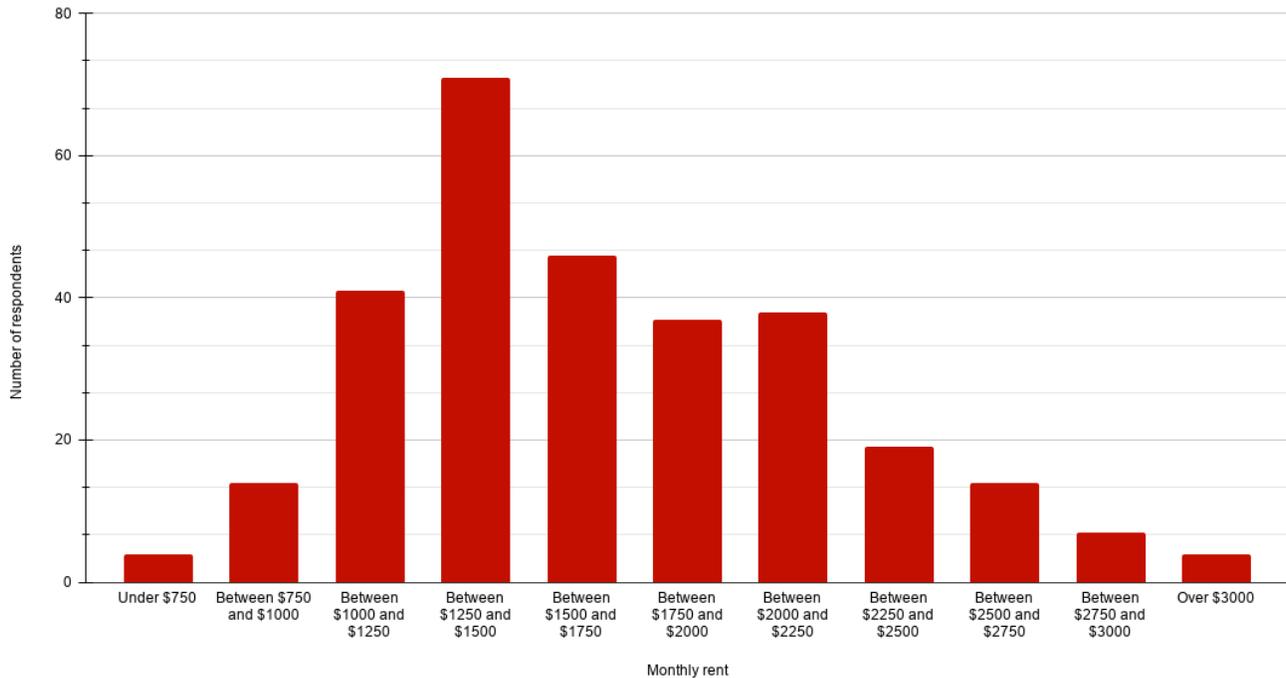


Newer tenants are increasingly paying for their electricity usage separately from their rent. More than two-thirds (68.6%) of tenants who have lived in their homes for less than five years pay hydro separately.

Meanwhile, 79.1% of tenants who've lived in their homes for over a decade have their hydro costs included with their monthly rent.

How much is your total monthly rent?

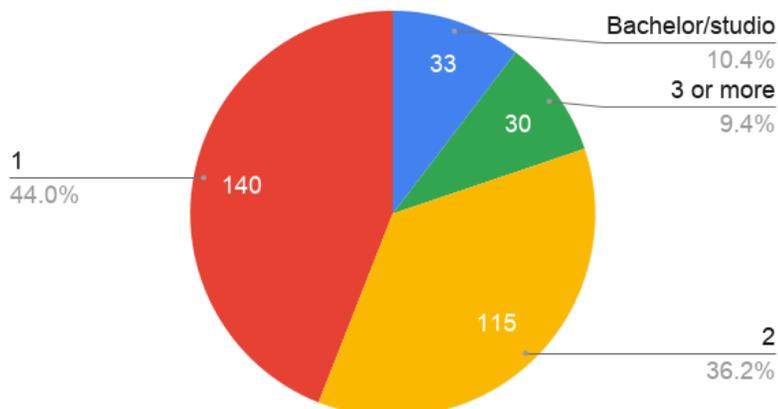
Market rent. Excludes respondents who indicated they had rent-geared-to-income



Just over half (51.9%) of respondents pay more than \$1500/month, while a quarter (25.8%) pay more than \$2000 each month. Only 23 respondents, or 7.2%, had a rent-geared-to-income apartment unit.

The most common type of apartment unit were 1 bedroom units (44%), followed closely by 2 bedroom apartments (36.2%).

How many bedrooms does your apartment have?



“Newer tenants are increasingly paying for their electricity usage separately from their rent.”

37.4%

of respondents received an Above-Guideline Increase in the last 12 months.

Building Upkeep & Maintenance

The chart below shows trends over the last four ACORN surveys. On the positive side, bedbugs have become less common amongst respondents, dropping from

ISSUE	2016	2020	2023	2026
Cockroaches	45%	41%	40.7%	44%
Bedbugs	30.5%	17.3%	19%	14.5%
Low or no heat	53%	44.9%	31.3%	43.1%
Extreme heat	Question not included	27.6%	31.3%	60.5%
Work orders are not fulfilled in a timely manner	Question not included	41%	43.5%	43.7%
Feeling threatened or targeted for submitting work orders or making complaints	28.7%	31.4%	33.7%	30.1%

(Toronto ACORN, 2016, 2020, 2023)

over 30% in 2016 to under half of that in 2026. **Unfortunately, most other common issues have not seen significant changes over the last decade.**

- **44% of tenants reported dealing with cockroaches**, compared to 45% in 2016.
- In every survey since 2016, roughly **two-fifths of respondents say their work orders aren't fulfilled in a timely manner** by their landlord.
- **Extreme heat is quickly becoming a top concern for tenants**, with over 60% stating that their apartment was too hot last summer, compared to 31.5% only three years ago.
- **Alarmingly, about a third of respondents have felt threatened or targeted for submitting work orders to their landlord or making complaints**—a statistic that has largely remained unchanged since 2016.

Top In-Unit Issues

1. **Flooring (40.1%)**
2. **Wall finishes (34.8%)**
3. **Ceiling (28.6%)**

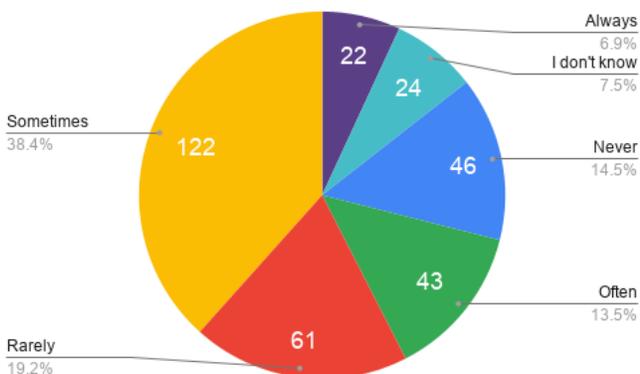
Top Common Area Issues

1. **Laundry room or machines (35.1%)**
2. **Stairwells (27.1%)**
3. **Garbage chutes (26.8%)**

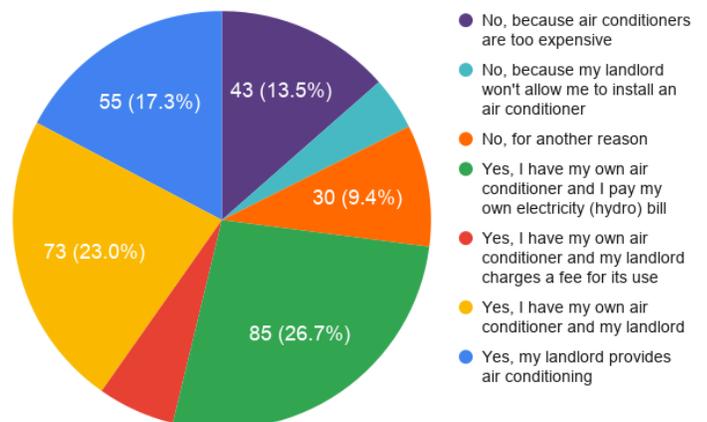
27% of survey respondents do not have access to air conditioning in their apartments. 13.5% of respondents say the reason is because it is too expensive.

For tenants, getting someone to come and do repairs is only half the battle. The other half is making sure the repairs that are done actually solve the problem. Toronto's Property Standards Bylaw requires that work be done in a "good workmanlike manner" (City of Toronto, 2026b, p. 10) However, only 20.4% of respondents say that maintenance workers and contractors always or often do quality work in their units or their buildings. A third (33.7%) say the work is rarely or never of good quality.

Do maintenance workers and contractors do quality work in your unit or in the building?



Do you have access to air conditioning?



City Services

Since the introduction of RentSafeTO in 2017, three ACORN surveys have been conducted including this one, asking tenants about their awareness and experiences of the program.

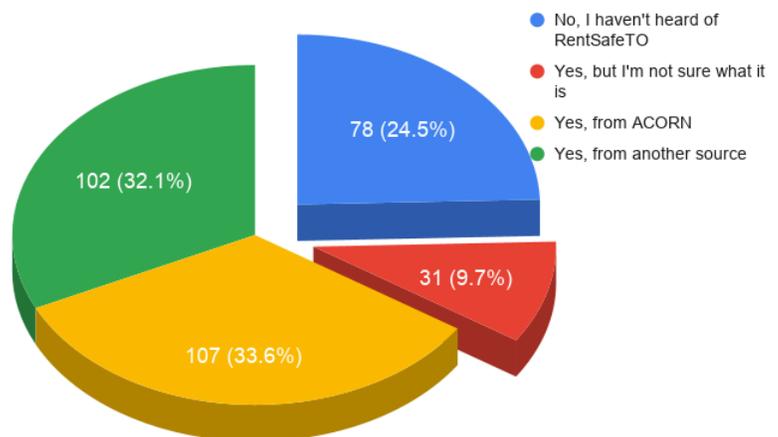
A crucial aspect of the RentSafeTO program is community engagement and outreach to tenants. Engagement methods used by the program include “door-to-door engagement, participation in tenant association or tenant advocacy meetings, attending community events, participating in councillor townhalls, conducting walkthroughs with building owners, and the circulation of the program’s semi-annual newsletter” (RentSafeTO, 2024)

Awareness of the RentSafeTO program has improved amongst tenants, with the number of survey respondents who were unaware of the program dropping from 53.2% in 2020 to less than half of that (24.5%) in 2026. Grassroots tenant organizing plays a role in building awareness of the program; 33.6% of respondents had heard about RentSafeTO via ACORN. A quarter of respondents (27.7%) have called 311 to file a service request related to their apartment in the last 12 months.

Unfortunately, 1 in 3 tenants (34.2%) still don’t know what RentSafeTO does or how it can help them, while 1 in 4 tenants (26.7%) weren’t aware that they could report property standards violations in their apartments to 311. Meanwhile, 9.7% didn’t report to 311 because they believed there was no point in doing so.

2020 Survey	2023 Survey
<p>3.9% have heard of RentSafeTO but didn't know what it was</p>	<p>6.5% have heard of RentSafeTO but didn't know what it was</p>
<p>53.2% have never heard of RentSafeTO</p>	<p>37.6% have never heard of RentSafeTO</p>

Before this survey, had you heard about the RentSafeTO program?



TENANT SURVEY TESTIMONIALS

Survey Question: *Is there anything else you'd like to share about the upkeep and maintenance of your building?*

The landlord of this building always cuts corners, [and] does not hire qualified professionals to perform repairs or perform maintenance. [...] We currently have a hole in our wall where bathtub pipes were replaced and the hole wasn't sealed. There is a hole under our bathtub and we can see light in our neighbour's unit below.

Having a corporate developer as a landlord is frustrating. The company they have hired to do all maintenance work does a horrible job, I assume intentionally, so we will eventually see ourselves out. Then they wont need to worry about rental replacement units when they bulldoze our homes and build their luxury condos

*HEAT MAX BYLAW PLEASE I
NEARLY DIED LAST YEAR*

*City inspectors rate my
building highly despite the
state of the building*

Bylaw get contacted, issue an order. The landlord claims work has been done when it hasn't, and bylaw closes case. Problem persists. No one cares.

RentSafeTO needs to [affect] repairs where the landlord won't. The City's handling of the issues at buildings owned by this landlord are unacceptable.

Bylaw officers have been dealing with the same issue for over 2 years with no improvement but instead resulting in a worsening situation. There does not seem to be any urgency or signs of responsiveness from property managers, owners or the unqualified contractors they engage on the urgency of the issue - in my case a roof which was so riddled with leaks that it was liable to collapse under the weight of the new roof that they installed to [fulfill] an order from the city.

Our landlord recently started turning down the thermostat, so now our (basement) apt. isn't heated well enough, usually, and we oftentimes have to use a supplemental heater! We've spoken to them about this, but they deny adjusting the setting. We're figuring that they would like us to move, since we've been here for almost 6 (long) years!!!

Heating barely works in the winters. Ive called the city and put work orders several times. I have to wait for the windows to be replaced and its taking years for them to get to my building. I use space heaters to stay warm and [now] the fuse is constantly blowing.

I was told it was too expensive to fix the dripping tap in my bath tub.

I don't feel valued as a tenant at times. I will report things and they don't get done.

They deal with cosmetic or small issues fairly quickly but chronic issues with the kitchen pipes or hot/cold water tends to take many work orders and complaints before they take it seriously and it's only bandaid solutions. The issues always come back after a few months. Same with the elevator maintenance.

Tenants have submitted multiple complaints to the city and RentSafe officers have attended, but Signet just ignores them and nothing changes. My unit doesn't have many issues because I have been there for so long, but everywhere else in the building is gross and not maintained to building standards.

Maintenance requests mysteriously disappear in the online portal or close when nothing was attempted.

I'm disabled, and there's really nothing to help people who are disabled in this building

The landlord only does the bare minimum or less that they're forced to do, takes a very long time to do what they choose to undertake, ignore urgent health & safety-related repairs e.g. leaking windows causing mould & electrical hazards because it doesn't fit their strategies, 'workmanlike' manner generally is seriously lacking...

There have been cockroach issues in the building since I moved in 3y ago, and building mgmt aren't proactive enough to address them (e.g. saying it's not a problem bc they only saw one in someone's unit) so it's been getting worse and worse.

My super tends to overshare and he told me the building is losing money so they are cutting back on maintenance costs.

The way this manifested was when I made a pest control request, I was told I had to wait until they had 3 of them so they could do multiple at once to cut costs. This means pest control is a huge hassle.

Survey Question: *If you've called 311 in past 12 months related to your apartment unit or building, what was your experience like?*

Helpful. I felt like we pushed our landlord into action they wouldn't have otherwise taken.

They were entirely most effective. I received support and encouragement.

It was okay. They seem understaffed and I didn't feel like they were able to do anything about the common areas of my building. Kept redirecting me to other departments which was frustrating

I never saw a bylaw officer after getting a report number.

No contact from person investigating. Then a text saying it's been closed.

They don't do enough. The landlord can perform patchwork repairs and hire dubious personnel. The repairs do not have a lasting effect but the City counts the file as being completed/closed. There is simply no point in contacting the City for help. They don't enforce standards.

The City does not follow up enough and the landlord does not complete the work in a timely manner. It is a constant back and forth between myself, the City, and the property management. It's too much for me.

I've never really had an issue with calling 311 itself the issue has consistently been with what happens after the call.

One officer told me he has a "good relationship" with my building's manager, which I found completely inappropriate. If there's already a friendly dynamic in place, it raises concerns about impartiality. It makes it feel like complaints may not be taken as seriously as they should be, or that enforcement won't be as firm as it needs to be.

Another officer mentioned that 311 has been receiving complaints about my building for years even before he was born. That honestly shocked me. If this has been an ongoing issue for that long, why are residents still dealing with the same problems in 2026? At some point, the lack of resolution suggests that someone is failing to properly enforce standards or follow through.

There's also inconsistency in the information being communicated. When I call 311, the representative will often say there are multiple complaints about the building. But when the officer arrives, they'll say I'm the only one calling. That contradiction is frustrating and confusing. I know I'm not the only resident experiencing these issues, so being told otherwise feels dismissive.

The way temperature inspections are conducted is another major concern. Officers say the unit must be below 21°C, yet they only measure the living room. The bedrooms and other areas are significantly colder, but those aren't tested. A single reading in one room doesn't accurately reflect the overall living conditions in the unit.

It's also frustrating that inspections tend to occur on warmer days. If it's mild outside, of course the indoor temperature will appear acceptable. But when we call during genuinely cold days when the heating problems are most severe no one comes. As a result, the issue isn't being documented under the conditions that actually demonstrate the problem.

Overall, the process feels inconsistent and ineffective. There are long-standing complaints, conflicting information, questionable impartiality, and inspection methods that don't capture the full reality of the situation. Meanwhile, the core issue inadequate heating throughout the unit remains unresolved.

Survey Question: How can the RentSafeTO program be made more effective?

Not allowing landlords prior notice before certain types of inspection like low heat. Our landlord will crank the boiler before the inspector arrives to negate the issue.

Inspections could include asking tenants about their experiences. Previous landlord only cleaned up common areas when inspection was due.

By taking tenant issues more seriously. By caring about us the same way they protect the landlords. The feeling is that they are not incentivized to do that, with little responsibility or consequence for the complaint. It's not great.

Have the city hire licensed contractors to do the needed work to bring building up to safe and liveable standards and bill the landlords for it.

They need to do more [than] basic follow-up. The City needs to make sure the work is done properly.

Step in more to deal with on going issues that aren't being fixed when brought up by the renters

Immediate fines for violations and more thorough inspections into the issues raised

Cover units under 3 storeys. I live in a 2 storey quadplex.

Follow up on tenants maintenance issues. Ensure landlord completes work issues

There need to be actual consequences for landlords and they need to be held to higher standard. My impression is that the ratings don't actually match tenant experience.

Strict enforcement of outstanding maintenance issues

Follow up when the landlord doesn't resolve the issue.

However they deem as necessary.

More awareness campaigns, more enforcement.

RentSafe must be more proactive and require landlords fix problems properly and in a timely way.

Don't exclude the tenant from investigation process, provide full transparency of investigation findings (documentation relied on to determine compliance), don't close "files" until tenant can respond, don't force tenant to file FOI for information related to their file...

More knowledge of its existence and what it can do.

Broadening the scope of buildings that need to register for rentsafeto

Regular annual/semi-annual outreach audits, so tenants don't need to feel cornered and desperate enough into contacting themselves, and to hold landlords accountable regardless of how much they intimidate tenants not to complain.

Make sure landlords maintain the building in a timely manner

Heating issues and bylaw officers come in the day when its not as cold as it is in the night

1) Have in-suite inspections. 2) Shorten the period between notification from a tenant of a deficiency and inspection. 3) More timely inspections to reflect current situations, rather than a two year lag 4) Enforcement of work orders and escalation to fines as needed.

More public education and advertisements

Higher fines, better enforcement, randomized inspections

They need more authority to enforce by-laws and building standards to hold landlords and building owners accountable and to ensure tenants are safe in the buildings they pay rent to.

Better enforcement, actual fines the City can issue landlords, Administrative Monetary Penalties

there need to be enough inspectors so that buildings are inspected more often. Tenants' concerns and complaints must be taken seriously.

It should include smaller buildings such as my 8 unit building--we can't engage RentSafe at all.

See a violation, write it up, follow it up. That's the actual job description, or should be, for an enforcement officer

TRANSPARENCY - ANNOYED THAT I HAD TO FILE A FOI TO ACQUIRE THE RESULTS FOR MY BUILDING'S INSPECTION, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THAT I WAS INJURED, AS A RESULT.

It would be great if people could call RentSafe for an officer to come and look at the issues, write up an order, give a copy to the tenant & have a copy on back-up if needed, and follow-up & enforce i.e. customer service for those for whom barriers exist e.g. language, culture, life/schedule demands, disability, etc.

make sure that building and unit fixes are not just Band-Aids and done cheaply.

Broadening the scope of buildings that need to register for rentsafeto

Put teeth into enforcement, not the gentle benefit of the doubt they give a LL. The program should be able to order or usurp control of the problem from the LL until fixed and paid for out of sequestered rent. Tell LLs that something must be fixed immediately, or Rentsafeto collects your rent and pays the repairs needed from that rent. The ability for a regulatory agency to take over control of a problem and get it fixed properly is something other jurisdictions have and use. Major and repeated issues could cost the LL his property rights and require unannounced re-inspections until it is deemed the LL is consistently doing what is required in a timely fashion.

I think it would be good if the Bylaw Officers had more knowledge about geothermal buildings and HVAC systems. There also seems to be some confusion about who initiates Public Health involvement. It would also be good if the Bylaw Officers would better believe the person making the call to them, and not be so quick to dismiss the complaint. Lastly, it would be good if Bylaw Officers had more authority to override the Property Services/Landlord when they dismiss the tenants complaint, even by discrediting them, and say "everything is working properly". I feel like this building ...keeps getting swept under the rug. :(

Please just fund it more. Hire more people. Do regulate inspections and step in when the landlord is negligent.

Give the inspectors some teeth - allow and encourage them to write out work orders when they do inspections and find deficiencies

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RENTSAFETO

Much of the legislation governing a person's experience as a renter in Toronto is within provincial jurisdiction. Rent control—or lack thereof—along with the imbalanced Landlord & Tenant Board and the weak laws around making older buildings wheelchair-accessible, are all responsibilities of the Government of Ontario.

But property standards and their enforcement are mostly in the City's hands. City Council has the power to ensure every tenant has a safe and healthy home. To do so, the RentSafeTO program must be strengthened.

Our survey data shows that aside from an apparent reduction in reports of bedbugs, many of the other poor conditions that Toronto tenants can experience have largely not improved over the last decade, from cockroaches, to low heat during winter, to trouble getting repairs done, to feeling threatened even asking their landlord for repairs.

Awareness of RentSafeTO has improved, but this hasn't necessarily led a better tenant experience with the program. Many respondents feel the program needs real teeth—strong enforcement tools and the willingness to use them—if it is to achieve its mission of ensuring that tenants live in safe, well-maintained buildings.

This is also dependent on its success in building and maintaining trust with tenants; we need to believe the program works if we're expected to continue calling 311 to report property standards violations. Otherwise, the 10% of respondents who said there was no point in calling the City is only going to grow.

In the interest of strengthening the RentSafeTO program, Toronto ACORN calls on Toronto City Council to adopt the recommendations herein contained.

URGENT: End “Education First” Enforcement

See A Violation? Issue An Order

The first step RentSafeTO officers take is to remind the landlord of their obligations, and ask them to remedy the problem. What too many tenants then experience is nothing changing, and little faith that reaching out to RentSafeTO again will help. Landlords know their obligations. An Order to Comply triggers a process and leaves a paper trail. It’s “a legislative requirement before any intervention by the City can occur” (City of Toronto, 2024).

If there’s found to be a violation, there should be an Order to Comply.

URGENT: Conduct In-Unit Inspections

We Don’t Sleep In The Lobbies And Laundry Rooms

We appreciate that this would be complex. Not only would a tenant need to consent to a City inspection as stated in provincial legislation, but inspecting even half of all of the apartment units in the City would overwhelm the current complement of officers (*Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*).

We firmly believe, however, that there must be a way to allow tenants to invite City inspectors into their homes to point out problems as part of the evaluation process. The best time to contact the City is when they’re already in the building.

Incorporate outreach and in-unit inspections into regular building evaluations.

URGENT: Publish Standard Operating Procedures

Make It Easy For Us To Know What To Expect From Enforcement

One of the criticisms in the City Ombudsman’s 2024 Report was inconsistent adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); one recommendation was to update these SOPs to make reference to when action is to be contemplated and when discretion may be used, whether that’s administrative penalties, fines, or remedial action (Addo & Patel, 2025). Tenants are tired of being told its a “case-by-case” basis. We want to know what to expect and when.

Publish the Standard Operating Procedures of RentSafeTO.

URGENT: Have Clear & Effective Follow-Up Processes

Make Sure Repairs Are In A “Good Workmanlike Manner”

There needs to be more active communication with the tenant before a RentSafeTO officer closes a file. They shouldn't just take the landlord's word that the issue has been addressed. Instead, officers need to make sure they're actively following up with the tenant, even if that means knocking on their door.

A crucial aspect of this follow-up is making sure the landlord didn't just paint over the problem. The Property Standards Bylaw requires repairs be made in a “good workmanlike manner.” The City should use this to stop Band-Aid fixes.

Actively follow up with tenants and uphold high standards for quality of work.

URGENT: Conduct Remedial Action

Step In When The Landlord Won't – Then Bill Them For The Work

Mayor Olivia Chow's motion to use the City's powers of remedial action to conduct long-overdue repairs and pest control at 500 Dawes Road is a breath of fresh air. Council should pass this motion. The City must continue on this path, learn from the experience, and be willing to step in when other bad landlords refuse to uphold property standards.

Publish and implement a remedial action framework for rental properties where the property owner has failed to comply with City orders or their property falls within the “Red” colour-rating under a RentSafeTO evaluation.

URGENT: Mandate A Universal Work Order Form

Make Asking For Service Accessible For Every Tenant

We've heard stories from seniors being told to “buy a computer” and neighbours whose work orders being deleted from the portal, despite the fact that landlords must keep a log of service requests. However, the law is silent on the format of these requests. Landlords have refused requests collected en masse by ACORN tenant unions because the forms used “aren't part of [the landlord's] system.”

Create an accessible and printable service request form with information about RentSafeTO and a way for tenants to keep a record of it, and mandate that all landlords must accept these forms, irrespective of their own systems.

Re-Weigh Evaluation Scores

Give Greater Penalties For More Serious Infractions

Too often, tenants see the results of the latest evaluation only to be left wondering how the building could've possibly scored that high. Categories and how much each one weighs in RentSafeTO evaluations needs to be revisited. An elevator that keeps breaking down every week, for example, needs to bring a building's score down more than it currently does.

Re-weigh each category in building evaluations to give greater impact to more serious bylaw violations.

Crack Down On Repeat Violations

If There's A Pattern Of Neglect, That Should Bring The Score Down

Tenants are done with Band-Aid fixes. If the same problem keeps coming back again and again, whether its pests or water damage, and there's a demonstrated pattern of neglect that causes the problem to keep re-appearing, there needs to be a greater impact on the building's evaluation score than there otherwise would be. Landlords should be incentivized to put in the effort to fix the problem the first time.

If a violation keeps recurring as a result of a pattern of neglect, that violation should have a greater impact on the building's evaluation score.

Continue To Expand RentSafeTO's Capacity

Add After Hours Capacity To Better Accommodate Tenants

Many tenants work during the day, which is also when the majority of RentSafeTO's work takes place. This presents a major barrier for tenants who cannot afford to take time off of work in order to receive a bylaw officer at their home. We appreciate that the RentSafeTO has been greatly expanded in recent years, and that made efforts to accommodate tenants after hours. But if the program is to truly meet the needs of Toronto's tenants, then it needs greater capacity to meet tenants where—and when—they're at.

Expand officer capacity for RentSafeTO, including capacity for an evening shift.

Improve Outreach To Tenants

There's No Substitute For Door-To-Door Engagement

The ability to engage door-to-door, face-to-face with tenants will make or break the success of the RentSafeTO program. Door-to-door outreach is already conducted during building audits. However, more needs to be done. Bylaw officers should be regularly going door-to-door, connecting with tenants, educating them about the program and their rights, and taking any enforcement action necessary if property standards violations are identified.

Expand door-to-door outreach and tenant engagement with RentSafeTO.

Notify Tenants About Upcoming Evaluations

Tenants May Need To Make Arrangements To Be Home

Landlords are given plenty of notice for any upcoming RentSafeTO inspections, but tenants are given no such notice. Many of us may not be home when these inspections occur, preventing us from speaking with the bylaw officers *during* the evaluation and showing them any problems they may have. Even something as simple as a flyer on every tenant's doorhandle letting them know when the evaluation will take place and how to contact RentSafeTO.

Give tenants a heads up when RentSafeTO is going to be inspecting their building.

Make It Easy To Identify Our Landlord

It's Already Public Information - Help Make It Accessible

For so many tenants, we don't know who we pay rent to each month. This lack of transparency makes it difficult to hold landlords accountable for the conditions of the properties they own. A registry of property management companies are already available in RentSafe's Open Data, and property ownership is publicly available through the Ontario Land Registry.

Make land title information for rental properties available in RentSafeTO's Open Data.

Evaluate Without Notifying The Landlord

Whenever And Wherever Possible

When a landlord receives a two-week heads up that the City is going to be sending an inspector to check out their property, that gives them plenty of time to spruce the place up. Meanwhile, the conditions of the tenants' apartments go unaddressed. We appreciate that some aspects require the landlord's cooperation—including access to the building and its records. But some aspects of building evaluations should be unannounced, so that inspectors see our homes as they really are.

Randomize some inspections and leave them unannounced to the landlord.

Make It Easy To Access Documents From Our Cases

FOI Requests Are Not Accessible For Low-Income Tenants

Evaluation data, and general information about specific Orders to Comply, are available on RentSafeTO's Interaction Building Map. However, if a tenant wants to access documentation from their specific service request, they have to file a Freedom of Information request to get it, forcing them to pay FOI fees. Not only does this needlessly prevent low-income tenants from accessing their files, but this also negatively impacts their ability to collect evidence for any proceedings at the Landlord & Tenant Board.

Allow tenants to access documentation related to their service request for free without filing a Freedom of Information request.

Strengthen Inter-Divisional Collaboration

Stop Bouncing Us From Department To Department

Nothing wears down the faith a tenant has in the City more than being told to call this or that phone number instead. While we understand that different issues, like mold and structural integrity, are handled by different divisions. However, the end-user experience for tenants needs to be unified and seamless, so that tenants don't fall through the cracks or give up whilst being shuffled from division to division.

Increase cross-divisional collaboration and improve the 311 end-user experience for tenants calling for RentSafeTO.

Accept Service Requests From The Community

We Care If Our Neighbours' Building Has Mold Growing On It

Right now, if a landlord owns a group of neighbouring apartment buildings and a tenant from one building calls 311 to report mold growing on the outside of another building, the City won't accept the service request, since the person calling is not living in the building with the mold on it. This technicality unnecessarily prevents neighbours and community members from reporting visible property standards violations from bad landlords on their block.

Start accepting service requests from concerned community members regarding apartment buildings.

Expand the Scope of RentSafeTO

Townhouses Should Be Held To The Same Standards

The scope of the program is vast, but there are gaps. Those living in townhouses, and there are plenty of horror stories shared by tenants and organizers about property standards violations in small-scale rentals like these. While a tenant could still call Municipal Licensing & Standards in these cases, a lack of accompanying community outreach and engagement infrastructure leaves many of these tenants unaware of their rights and protections.

Expand the mandatory registration for landlords with RentSafeTO to include rental townhouses, and conduct outreach to these properties.

Create A Municipal Rent Escrow Account

Hold Our Rent In Trust If The Landlord Refuses Repairs

Why should tenants keep paying our rent to a landlord who isn't using that money to actually fix our homes? In Los Angeles, when a property standards violation is identified and a landlord does not correct it within the prescribed timeframe, tenants can apply to pay their rent into the City's Rent Escrow Account Program. This money can be used to pay for repair work, but is only released fully to the landlord once the City is satisfied that all violations have been addressed.

The City of Toronto should create a similar Rent Escrow Account Program for tenants to pay their rent into when Orders to Comply go unaddressed.

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