



Building Safety Tips for Renters

Everyone deserves to live in a home that doesn't threaten their safety or their life. No matter who lives in a building — be it the property owner, or renters — all deserve the same level of safety.

Property owners have the legal responsibility for ensuring their buildings are safe for occupants.

Illegal dwellings endanger the safety of occupants, neighbors and first responders. If you are looking to rent living space, here are some tips:

Tips for recognizing an illegal dwelling:

- **Building type.** Commercial buildings such as warehouses, churches, retail stores etc. are usually not permitted for residential living. This is because there are more safety requirements for buildings in which people live, and most commercial buildings don't meet these standards.
- **No lease.** Beware of no-lease agreements. Be suspicious of a landlord who declines to draw up a lease, or insists on a month-to-month agreement or cash-only payments. These can be signs of an illegal rental.
- **No certificate of occupancy.** When in doubt, check to see whether your living space has a certificate of occupancy for residential use. If it does, it means the building itself meets minimum safety requirements for a residence. If your landlord can't or won't provide these documents, you can check with Denver Community Planning and Development at cpd.permitrecords@denvergov.org or 3-1-1.

Ways to improve life safety in your home:

- **Fire safety.** Your landlord should provide smoke and carbon monoxide detectors with working batteries in multiple locations, and at least one fire extinguisher.
- **Egress.** Have two easy ways to get out in an emergency. Basements, attics or commercial spaces typically lack adequate exits. Any sleeping area should have an egress window — an operational window large enough for escape in an emergency.
- **Walls.** With rare exceptions, walls should be floor-to-ceiling and made of framing and drywall. Plywood and other ad hoc materials can accelerate a fire and prevent escape.
- **Electrical.** It's easy to overload electrical systems in an old building. If you are blowing fuses, popping breakers or causing electrical panels/conduits/outlets to become hot, you are overloading the system and risking a fire. Do not use extension cords as permanent wiring.
- **Structural.** Large cracks running down a wall or ceiling in your building could be signs of structural damage, an issue that can cause serious problems — including partial building collapses or pipe bursts — if not addressed by the owner in a timely manner.
- **No haphazard construction.** Kitchens, stairs, lofts, etc., may not be installed or constructed without the proper city permits. Permits ensure the work was done properly by a licensed professional, and did not cut corners or compromise occupants' safety.
- **Learn more.** More tips are available at NFPA.org/public-education.



Building Safety Tips for Landlords

Everyone deserves to live in a home that doesn't threaten their safety or their life. No matter who lives in a building — be it you, or your renters — all deserve the same level of building safety.

As the property owner, you have the legal responsibility for ensuring your building is safe for occupants.

Illegal dwellings endanger the safety of occupants, neighbors and first responders. They can also expose the property owner to criminal liability and lawsuits should a fire or other incident occur.

In Denver and all over the United States, a set of internationally-recognized building and fire codes ensures basic safety for people no matter who they are or what the building is used for. These codes apply to every single building in Denver. Help protect your assets by following these tips for keeping your building and its occupants safe.

- **Commit to costs.** Property ownership comes with a financial commitment. Construction work to bring a building up to code can be pricy, and getting plan review, permits and inspections can feel onerous. But when you do it, you can be sure your building is safe, its design will support the demands of your use, and you are better protected from liability.
- **Get permits.** Before renting out a space, be sure to obtain a zoning use permit for residential use, and a certificate of occupancy for residential use. If the space has both, it means the use is allowed in that location and the building itself meets minimum safety requirements for a residence. Get started at denvergov.org/DS.
- **Building systems.** Ensure that the electrical and HVAC systems are in good, working order. Damaged, exposed or loose electrical wiring is a fire hazard. Carbon monoxide poisoning can result if the rental unit is not properly ventilated.
- **Preventive maintenance.** As the landlord, you must make sure electrical systems and wiring are installed correctly in your buildings. Have electrical systems checked by a licensed electrician if it hasn't been done in 10 years or more. Have a professional tighten any loose electrical connections, oil any moving parts and inspect gas connections.
- **Educate your renters.** Understand that your renters may not be familiar with building and fire safety basics, and provide them with information and guidance. For example, discourage them from improperly using extension cords or overloading circuits. Safety tip sheets are available at NFPA.org/public-education.
- **Seek help.** If you can't afford to make your property code-compliant, there are local organizations that can help. Visit denvergov.org/DS for a list of local resources.

** These tips are focused on residential renting. Commercial tenants bear more responsibility for acquiring permits.*