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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

## After fatal fire at crowded Allston home, city inspectors issue a dozen citations at properties

Posted by Matt Rocheleau May 31, 2013 12:04 PM

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(City of Boston Inspectional Services Department)  
A building inspector stood outside an Allston home where officials found a possible blocked entry way during a code sweep last week. The door was taped off, and a sign told guests to enter through another door.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

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After a student died in a recent fire at an allegedly crowded Allston home, city inspectors swept through the surrounding neighborhood visiting more than 100 properties and issuing more than a dozen citations for housing code violations.

The crackdown focused on a part of Allston where a high concentration of students live and where inspectors frequently respond to reports of unsafe, unsanitary, and illegal living conditions.

“We want to let residents and landlords know that we’re out there,” said building inspector Brian Ronan. “We are there to work with them, but we take [inspections] very seriously.”

During the “code compliance sweep” last Thursday afternoon, inspectors went door-to-door handing out and posting flyers about the city and state housing rules and about newly-passed city legislation designed to better keep track of rental properties and to ensure they are being inspected properly.

Inspectors visited buildings and units responding to complaints of possible rodent infestations, trash violations and safety hazards. They also looked for buildings with illegal units including in basements and attics.

And, “We were knocking on doors and asking tenants if they want us to inspect the property or if there was something that they were worried about that they wanted us to check out for them,” Ronan said.

The team of more than 15 inspectors from the Inspectional Services Department included representatives from the department’s housing, building and code enforcement divisions.

They stopped at more than 100 properties primarily in the “GAP area” of Allston, which has been prone to various problems over quality of life issues.

The nickname for the area is derived from the first letter of three successive streets – Gardner, Ashford and Pratt – which run parallel to one another branching off Linden Street. Along with those streets, the crackdown also extended to Wadsworth and Chester streets and Brighton Avenue.

Some of the citations issued included fines. Most were for \$25 each, bringing the grand total to \$300-plus.

Ronan said the effort was intended to raise awareness and was similar to other sweeps city inspectors conduct in that area, including each September when many students arrive for the fall semester.

The campaign was also meant “to calm some nerves” over a fatal fire last month.

A three-alarm fire at 87 Linden St. on April 28 killed Binland Lee, a 22-year BU student.

City inspectors [cited the landlord](#) there for running an illegal rooming house and for not obtaining permits needed to create bedrooms in the basement. Lee allegedly shared the three-story home with 18 other tenants. Investigators have said the fire was started by the careless disposal of smoking materials.

That blaze came 15 months after [another fire](#) a couple of buildings away – a fraternity house at 84 Linden St. – sent seven students to the hospital, including one who fell into a coma after jumping from a second-floor window. He later awoke but suffered neurological problems.

After that fire and again in September, city officials went door-to-door around the area to raise awareness about fire prevention. In the wake of the deadly fire in April, city officials have again asked students and other tenants to contact authorities if they believe their dwellings pose a safety risk or violate city laws.

City officials also hope that a recently-passed [rental housing inspection ordinance](#) will aid their ability to improve safety. The ordinance requires, starting this month, that property owners register rental units with the city and rental properties will be subject to more frequent inspection.

During the code sweep last week, Ronan said inspectors tried to access to two properties in particular: one on Gardner Street, where they believe a windowless upstairs storage room is being used as a bedroom; the other on Ashford Street where they believe an exit is blocked from the inside.

“If there was a fire, they’d be trapped,” Ronan said.

He said that because city inspectors have received no response from those properties after three tries, they are seeking a court order to inspect each site with assistance from police.

“Most of the landlords are OK for the most part,” he said. “Another thing is the students. Sometimes they do things on their own,” including letting friends live with them for extended periods of time, removing smoke detectors, or blocking exits that lead to citations being issued.

“A lot of times they just don’t know any better. So we’re out there to try to let them know,” said Ronan. “And, if they have problems with their landlord we want them to know they can call us.”

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(City of Boston Inspectional Services Department

After last Thursday's code sweep, Inspectional Services Department Commissioner Bryan Glascock (not pictured) tells city inspectors, police and City Councilor Mark Ciommo about where inspections were done, where violations were found and where flyers were distributed.

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