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Boston issues nearly 3,500 fines during move-in

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City of Boston Inspectional Services looked over violations in the Allston area during last week's move-in rush.

By Matt Rocheleau

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It's an annual rite of fall here as routine as the [moving trucks crashing into overpasses on Storrow](#)

Drive.

Boston officials say they handed out nearly 3,500 fines to landlords for excessive trash and other property code infractions and issued another 365 violations of housing, building, and environmental codes in the days around Sept. 1, when tens of thousands move in and out of apartments in this college hub.

As in [previous years](#), most infractions were found in the city's most student-heavy neighborhoods, Allston, Brighton, Fenway, and Mission Hill.

There are more than 165,000 rental units in Boston and [officials estimate](#) that between 60 and 70 percent of them are on lease cycles that end as August turns to September. Many of those moving are college students preparing to start the fall semester.

The city [deploys dozens of workers each year](#) to try to help the process run as smoothly as possible.

Municipal code enforcement officers cite landlords if [discarded furniture and trash](#) pile up on sidewalks outside their properties. Meanwhile, inspectors tour apartments looking for violations, particularly those that could pose health and safety hazards.

The city's Public Works Department said it issued a total of 3,483 fines to landlords citywide for property code violations between Aug. 29 and Sept. 4.

City officials said they could not provide a breakdown on what those citations were for, but historically the most common infraction around move-in each year has been excessive trash.

Separately, between Sept. 1 and 4, the city's Inspectional Services Department issued 365 violations after inspecting apartments. The violations do not impose fines on



landlords but require them to remedy problems within a specified period of time.

“General safety” violations accounted for the bulk, or 197, of the infractions.

Other violations included 33 for rodent activity and 27 for smoke or carbon monoxide detectors that were either not working or were missing.

On the bright side, no violations were issued for “bat activity,” which landlords have been cited for in previous years.

William Christopher, head of the inspection department, said his team saw better conditions overall. He said efforts have paid off in recent years to collaborate with universities and to hold regular educational meetings with landlords.

“That has helped because they know what the expectations are, and more of them make sure they comply,” he said.

Still, there is room for improvement.

Some landlords “didn’t seem to get the message, or they ran into a situation that didn’t allow them to adhere,” Christopher said.

One city rule that did not generate any violations again this move-in season was one that bars more than four undergraduates from living together in off-campus apartments.

The city has [never](#) successfully cited anyone for breaking it, even though the rule was adopted in 2008, and, as the Globe Spotlight team [detailed](#) two years ago, violations are believed to be common.

Some residents have expressed [frustration](#) at the lack of enforcement amid concerns that student overcrowding has created safety and quality-of-life issues and driven up rents, and that the city’s long-term solution — building more dorms — is more than a decade away from completion.

Christopher said his department did not make enforcement of the rule a priority during the recent move-in because it is awaiting reports universities are required to submit by Oct. 1 that show how many students live at each address.

Once the city has that data, he said, officials plan to turn their focus to violations of the no-more-than-four rule and other cases of overcrowding that may arise. The city recently made [a series of regulatory changes](#) aimed at strengthening its ability to address those issues through enforcement.


“It’s still very much on our radar,” said Christopher.

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