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# Find out if your Boston apartment has a history of problems, and what to do if it does

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DINA RUDICK/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

**Indira Alvarez and Ed Coburn of Boston's Inspectional Services Department watched as students hauled furniture in and out of an apartment on Linden Street in Allston last year.**

By **Matt Rocheleau**

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GLOBE STAFF AUGUST 31, 2017

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So you're moving into an apartment in Boston this week, and you've uncovered some issues. Maybe it's a broken stove, a busted smoke detector, or your doors and windows don't lock right.

Should you worry that it could be a sign that your unit — perhaps your landlord — has a history of problems?

A new city website can help. It lets renters or prospective homeowners type in an address and pull up past violations and complaints for that property.

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The online tool, called [RentSmart](#) and available at [rentsmart.boston.gov](http://rentsmart.boston.gov), displays for each property up to five years of information about violations issued by the city, including for housing and building code infractions. It also features data about housing-related complaints as well as sanitation and civic-maintenance-related requests for each address.

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The tool relies on several databases maintained by city departments.

City officials said the tool may be a valuable resource for parents and families of college students, who are at particular risk for living in unsafe housing because violations in off-campus units often go unreported.

A [Globe Spotlight investigation](#) in spring 2014 uncovered a host of overcrowded, unsafe off-campus units in the city's college neighborhoods.

Each year, [in the days around Sept. 1](#), the city deploys dozens of inspectors and code enforcement officers who keep an eye out for problems, issue violations, and talk with new students and residents.

### What to do if you spot a problem in your apartment?

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- You may not be sure what to look out for in the first place. The city has a [checklist here](#) of some of the most common problems that turn up in apartments. The state also has a related guide [here](#). City officials [advise](#): “Before entering into a rental agreement, check out the condition of the apartment. If you cannot, have a friend do it for you and inform the property owner of any noted conditions. You do not want to be charged for damage that was already there before you moved in!”
- If you find a potential violation, you should report it to your landlord, and it's preferable to make requests and get responses in writing. The city advises contacting the landlord first to try to remedy the problem.
- If your landlord doesn't make necessary repairs, call the city's [Inspectional Services Department](#)

and file a complaint at 617-635-5322, or report it via the city's [311](#) service, a department that fields questions and complaints 24/7.

■ And, you'll want to remember, that tenants have [responsibilities](#) and rules to follow, too. Your landlord could file a complaint against you for various reasons, including if you cause damage, don't give them access to your apartment to make repairs, or don't take good care of your unit.

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