

Calling a Tenant Meeting

Apart-meant

“United we stand” goes back to Aesop’s Fables. There is strength in numbers. It is so basic a notion we often don’t think about it. It is easy for the bully to pick on an individual, whether it’s a kid in the schoolyard, the landlord, a resident manager, or an employer. If all the kids in the schoolyard converged on the bully and gave him what he deserves, he would never be a bully again, and neither would anyone else. You have come to this point because you have a problem landlord/manager who bullies a single tenant to threaten eviction or whatever. Rather than make yourself a target, you join forces with your neighbors. You are meant to be apart, and your forming a group is the single most dangerous event for the landlord: he might soon have to treat you like customers and people, or face what you can collectively do together. Everyone in your building probably feels the same as you do, but they’re simply afraid to say something for fear the landlord will punish them. That’s what oppression is: letting the bully continue for fear of being the next victim. You can stop it.

The First Meeting

You can have the meeting in your apartment or in the recreation room or at a local restaurant. You need to have some seating, although some will be happy to sit on the floor or stand. Bottled water and chips are just fine and cost little. Napkins and paper plates/plastic forks should be handy in case others bring food. Coffee or tea are OK, but alcohol is not a good idea, at least for the first meeting.

It is best not to make the first meeting sound like a confrontation. It will scare some neighbors away. The accompanying flier is helpful for you to get it started. You make it sound like a party, but mention some of the things they might want to discuss and give them the ability to voice anonymously. If you have shipping or mailing labels or some simple adhesive tags and a marker, people can put their first name on it, and everyone can address them more personally. It breaks the ice. Have a box by the door and tell them that if they have things they’d like to discuss, they can drop them in the box.

Have a sign in sheet, like the Roster “Please Update Me” included here. This allows more discreet discussions, planning and information sharing than a meeting, and people can feel more comfortable participating. You can make a master email list, and “bcc” everyone, so that no one knows who else is getting the information, or who is not. You explain that the Roster is to keep them posted.

YOU do not have to be the leader, nor direct discussion. Leaders will emerge. Groups will form. There will only be a few who do all the work, but the group will mostly participate when the time comes. You simply thank them for coming, ask them to give their name when they speak and try not to hog the conversation. Thank by name those who brought refreshments and identify what it was, clapping. They should refer to each other by name “I agree with Jim...” and particularly show support for a shared concern or solution. You tell them that all we’re trying to do in this first meeting is identify the most common concerns we have. You can ask who would like to start it off, and if no one speaks, you can say, “Well, what prompted me to call this meeting is the problem I have with X - does anyone else have that concern?” [raise of hands] “Tell us about yours, Jim.” And so forth.

The fervor will build. People will be reminded of something by what someone else said, and the conversation will get excited. You will get a consensus, and identify the top three things that they are concerned about. If they want a Neighborhood Watch group to start, the local police department is more than happy to send out the officers who patrol your area to your next meeting. If they need legal help, you can tell them that you found a website that has a lawyer and can give some guidance to the group on how best to handle it. You can call a press conference and get into the local news, if that’s of interest, or plan to attend the next City Council meeting to voice your concerns.

You're invited!



Please come to a special meeting of the residents to talk about problems in the building and what we can do about them.

Your input is important.

You will see that you are not alone in your concerns. Solutions are easier than you think.

This is our home. Let's make it feel like that.

We are neighbors. Let's act like it.

We are strangers. We just might become friends.

This is a *very informal* gathering, so please be casual. If you would like to bring light refreshments, that would be nice, but not necessary.

Depending on what the group wants, we might have more meetings or take further action in smaller groups. What is your concern? Starting a Neighborhood Watch? Getting repairs done? The manager? Finding the real landlord? Whatever it is, you can say it and you can be sure others will agree.

When: _____ at _____ AM/PM

Where: _____ Host: _____

We can expect that this will last an hour or so, but you can leave whenever you'd like, or stay longer.

RSVP: please call _____ or email _____@_____ if you are interested and plan to attend or can't attend but still want to be involved or learn more. If there's something you want to talk about, but don't want the landlord to know it came from you, just leave an anonymous phone message or write it on a piece of paper to leave in the box when you come in.

Habitability Checklist

This list is a guide to help you identify all of the things that can affect habitability, based upon Civil Code §1941.1 and Health and Safety Code §17920.3. Due to the variety of circumstances which can arise in a given rental situation, all of the possible conditions can't be listed, so you should use your own judgment to determine whether a particular condition you are concerned with is like one of those listed here. Plainly stated, just because it's not on this list doesn't mean it isn't an uninhabitable one, particularly if it adversely affects living there.

Electrical

- The power is unstable (goes out)
- Wall switches
 - some not working
 - Cover plates missing/broken
- Light fixtures not all working
 - Exterior grounds lights
 - For exterior doors
 - For stairways
 - For garage/parking
 - For common walkways
- Electrical outlets don't all work
 - No shocks from any part
 - GFI plugs near water
 - kitchen sink
 - bathroom sink
- Fans
 - ceiling [eg, bathroom]
 - heater [eg, bathroom]
 - above stove
 - ceiling circulation fans
- Smoke alarms don't work properly
- Doorbell doesn't work
- Security system doesn't work

Heating/Air Conditioning

- Furnace
 - Missing or broken
 - Does not work
 - Thermostat broken
 - Inadequate heat
 - Pilot goes out
 - Produces odor
 - Noisy during operation
 - Some rooms get no heat
 - Ducts are broken
 - Asbestos in ducts
 - Air filters failed
 - Vents don't work
- Other heaters
 - heat lamps don't work
 - wall heaters don't work
 - portable units don't work
- Air Conditioning
 - Units don't work
 - Inadequately cooling
 - Noisy
 - Thermostats don't work

Plumbing

- Hot and cold water supplied
 - Insufficient hot water
 - Inadequate water pressure
 - hot only
 - both
 - faucets
 - Bathroom
 - Kitchen
 - Patio
 - Wet bar
 - washing machines
 - Sudden bursts
 - pressure varies a lot
- Dirty/unhealthy water
 - rust/discoloration
 - Odors
 - bad taste [eg, sewage]
- Inadequate drainage
 - Backups into sink/tub
 - Slow drainage
 - Regularly a problem
 - in shower/bathtub
 - Kitchen sinks
 - Bathroom sinks
- Toilets
 - Slow fill and flush
 - Sewage backups/overflows
 - Flushing mechanism broken
 - Leaks
 - From water line to wall
 - from the base on the floor
 - from the fixture itself
- Garbage disposal
 - Doesn't work
 - Backs up
- Bathtub drain doesn't work
- Sink stoppers don't work
- Faucets on sinks and tub
 - loose or broken
 - hard to move
 - Drip/trickle
- Other Leaky plumbing
 - Faucets leak
 - when used
 - always
 - Onto or under counter
 - Drains under sink
 - Dishwasher
 - Garbage disposal
 - Clothes washer
 - Hoses -hot and cold intake

- Drainage hose
- Washing Machine itself
- Broken pipes in ceiling, wall
- Sewer/Septic system
 - don't work
 - Inadequately maintained
 - Surface discharge, leaks
 - odor
 - discharge under building
- Kitchen sink counter
 - tiled
 - nonporous and cleanable
- Exterior faucets
 - don't work/leak
- Swimming pool/jacuzzi
 - don't work
 - leaks
 - pump/filter broken
 - will not heat

Flooring

- Uncovered holes in floors
- Floor separating from wall
- Weak or loose floorboards
- Buckling or uneven floors
- Loose/chipped/missing tiles
- Loose/torn/missing linoleum
- Torn or loose carpeting
- Nails sticking up through carpet
- Exposed carpet tack strips
- Carpeting mildewed or moldy
- Carpeting stinks/unsanitary
- Carpet torn/frayed, trip hazard

Windows

- Inadequate number of windows
- Inadequate ventilation from windows
- cracks or broken glass
- gaps in panes or windows
- Inadequate weather sealing
- Windows that should open
 - Don't open easily
 - stick
 - Don't stay open as needed
 - Don't close completely
 - Don't latch
- Ground floor windows have no lock
- Window screens
 - Holes or tears
 - Missing from some/all
 - Frames unbent, unbroken

Doors

- ___ Interior doors
 - ___ Loose in frame/maladjusted stick
 - ___ Will not close securely
 - ___ Missing knobs
 - ___ Missing working latches
- ___ Exterior doors
 - ___ Loose in frame/maladjusted stick
 - ___ Will not close securely
 - ___ Missing knobs
 - ___ Missing working latches
 - ___ Missing working deadbolts
 - ___ Inadequate weather stripping
 - ___ Key does not work well
 - ___ Threshold is broken
 - ___ Broken glass
- ___ Sliding glass doors
 - ___ stick
 - ___ Do not completely close
 - ___ will not lock securely
 - ___ tears or holes in screen
 - ___ Screen door loose in track
 - ___ Screen door will not latch
 - ___ Cracks or broken glass
- ___ Other exterior screen doors
 - ___ Improperly mounted
 - ___ Will not close fully
 - ___ Will not latch/lock
 - ___ Frame bent/broken
 - ___ Holes /tears in screen
 - ___ Does not close properly
 - ___ Cannot be secured open

Structure

- ___ Ceiling
 - ___ falling sown
 - ___ holes, flaking, looseness
 - ___ leaks, stains from leaks
 - ___ collapsing or soft
 - ___ damp
 - ___ leaks during rains
 - ___ leaks regularly
 - ___ weak, damp or soft spots
- ___ Walls
 - ___ Weak/loose/unconnected
 - ___ holes or gaps
 - ___ to outside
 - ___ missing wall surface
 - ___ at connection to floor/ceiling
 - ___ weak, damp or soft spots
 - ___ inadequate insulation
 - ___ permits water from outside
 - ___ Exterior walls not sealed
- ___ Shower area waterproofed
- ___ Basement
 - ___ floods
 - ___ inadequately sealed

- ___ unstable basement walls
- ___ Stairways/ rails
 - ___ insecure, unsafe
 - ___ dilapidated, failing
- ___ Exterior porch/deck unstable
- ___ Paint
 - ___ flaking or peeling
 - ___ lead-based

Appliances (supplied with unit)

- ___ Appliances don't all work
 - ___ Stove
 - ___ Refrigerator
 - ___ Dishwasher
 - ___ Clothes washer/dryer
 - ___ Air conditioner
 - ___ Garbage Disposal
 - ___ Trash compactor

Common Areas

- ___ Entryway doesn't work
- ___ Security gate doesn't work
- ___ Swimming pool
 - ___ doesn't work
 - ___ has stagnant/unhealthy water
 - ___ slippery pool deck
 - ___ No fence around pool
 - ___ Missing safety devices
 - ___ inadequately lit
- ___ Elevator
 - ___ doesn't work
 - ___ works sporadically
 - ___ does not function properly
- ___ Exterior lighting inadequate
 - ___ walkways/hallways
 - ___ stairwells
 - ___ parking areas
 - ___ outside of units
 - ___ Entrance to building
- ___ Intercom system doesn't work
- ___ Walkways have trip hazards
- ___ laundry room
 - ___ machines don't work
 - ___ inadequately lit
 - ___ filthy with debris and trash
- ___ Inadequate trash bins/pickup
- ___ Trash/debris/junk around grounds

Nuisances

- ___ Infestations
 - ___ mice/ rats/ rodents
 - ___ cockroaches
 - ___ ants
 - ___ spiders
 - ___ termites
 - ___ bees/ wasps/ hornets
 - ___ flies/mosquitos
 - ___ pigeons/bats
 - ___ Raccoons/opposums
- ___ Mold, mildew, mushrooms
- ___ Unsanitary water supply
- ___ raw sewage on exterior ground
- ___ Noxious fumes from sewer
- ___ Toxic/noxious fumes
 - ___ smoke from neighbors in building
 - ___ chemicals, paints, neighbors
- ___ Drug trafficking on the premises
- ___ Gang activity on the premises
- ___ Criminal acts by other tenants
 - ___ Assault /molestation
 - ___ violent crimes
 - ___ prostitution in the building
- ___ Noise
 - ___ construction in the building
 - ___ other tenants in the building
 - ___ noisy functioning of building
- ___ Blocking entry and exit
 - ___ of vehicles
 - ___ of pedestrian traffic

NOTES