

**GENERAL GUIDELINES**

**HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS HQS  
INSPECTIONS**

**Housing Choice Voucher  
Section 8 Program**

**St. Petersburg Housing Authority**





## **IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS**

December 1, 2001

Attention All Landlords:

Several years ago, the St. Petersburg Housing Authority adopted City Code requirements in addition to Housing Quality Standards as its policy for determining whether units meet program requirements. City Code requirements also include requirements for Ground Fault Interrupt installation and Yard Maintenance Standards. The following is an excerpt from SPHA's policy. Effective December 1, 2001, SPHA Inspectors will begin enforcing these requirements. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. Thank you for your continued support and participation in the Section 8 / Housing Choice Voucher Program.

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## **GROUND FAULT INTERRUPTERS**

All 125-volt, single-phase, 15 and 20-ampere receptacles installed in the locations specified below shall have ground-fault circuit interrupter protection in accordance the National Electric Code:

- Bathrooms
- Garages, and grade – level portions of unfinished accessory buildings used for storage or work areas

*Exception 1- Receptacles that are not readily accessible.*

*Exception 2- A single receptacle or a duplex receptacle for two appliances located within dedicated space for each appliance that in normal use is not easily moved from one place to another, and that is cord and plug connected in accordance with code.*

- Outdoors
- Crawl Spaces- Where the crawl space is at or below grade level.
- Kitchens- Where the receptacles are installed to serve the countertop surfaces.
- Wet bar sinks- Where the receptacles are installed to serve the countertop surfaces and are located within 6 ft of the outside edge of the wet bar sink.

## **YARD MAINTENANCE STANDARDS**

- The lawn must be mowed so that grass is six inches or less in overall height and maintain ground cover plants at an overall height of 18 inches or less.
- The lawn must be edged and/or growths must be removed from driveways, sidewalks, curb lines, or gutters.
- All shrubs must be edged in the public right-of-way that adjoins the property must be trimmed to a height of three feet or less.
- Hedges in front yards must be trimmed to a height of four feet or less.
- Shrubs and trees over the public right-of-way and sidewalks must be trimmed up to a height of eight feet to allow motorists to see past them and to allow pedestrians to walk under them.
- Vegetation, which is a hazard to public safety, such as vegetation with thorns, must be removed from the right-of-way area.
- Trees over the street must be trimmed to a height of fourteen feet above the street surface.
- Grass clippings, tree trimmings and other vegetative material must be stored on the property.
- Ground cover, including but not limited to grass, mulch, and/or shrubbery for all exposed sand or soil areas is required. Xeriscape is also considered an acceptable form of ground cover.

# **SPHA General Guidelines** **for Housing Quality (HQS) Inspections**

The objective of Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections is to ensure that all dwellings, apartments and rooming houses provide for a safe and healthy environment with living facilities arranged and equipped to ensure such condition.

The Housing Authority has reviewed both HUD HQS Standards and the City of St. Petersburg Building Codes Standards. The Housing Authority applies the more stringent criteria requirements for items that must be inspected under HUD HQS.

The following information details the general guidelines that the St. Petersburg Housing Authority (SPHA) uses to conduct HQS inspections.

## **1. Plumbing Systems**

Check to make sure that pipes under the sink are in good conditions. No leaking or dripping faucets. Drain lines and required traps should be functional and not leaking.

- A. All plumbing facilities and fixtures shall be connected to a potable water supply and to the public sewer or other approved sewage disposal system and be free from sewer backup.
- B. All sinks and tubs must be able to retain water.
- C. All sinks and commode water lines must have shutoff valves, unless faucets are well mounted.

NOTE: Taped drain lines are **NOT ACCEPTABLE**.

## **2. Hot Water Heater**

Check hot water heater to make sure that it has a discharge line and relief valve. The discharge line must be at least 3 inches from the floor leading to a drip pan or directly to the outside. Water is to be heated to a temperature of not less than 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Unit must be in a place that can be visually checked. No combustible or other materials posing a fire hazard are to be stored next to the unit.

## **3. Heating System**

Every unit must have a heating system that works properly and is adequate for the size unit. To determine heat input vs. room size the following formula is used:

- 1. Estimate the volume of the living area (only the area to be heated) and take the length X width X height of each room to get total cubic feet.
- 2. Calculate the maximum heater input (without vent) that would be allowed by multiplying the volume to be heated by 30 BTU's per hour.
- 3. This will give you the total number of BTU's per hour that could be produced within this space without a vent.

Heating equipment must be safely and adequately heat dwelling to a minimum air temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit measured 3 feet above the floor. Owner-supplied heat source must be available whenever the outside temperature is 65 degrees Fahrenheit or less.

NOTE: Portable heaters do not qualify as a heating system. Heating systems must be permanently attached with a properly vented system.

#### 4. Electrical Wiring

All interior wiring must be in the wall or protected by conduit. Must ensure proper grounding of electrical system per National Electrical Code.

NOTE: Lamp cords being used as a permanent part of the electrical wiring are considered an electrical hazard.

#### 5. Electrical Outlets

The outlets required by type of room are:

1. Living Room-Requires 2 outlets or 1 outlet and 1 permanently installed ceiling or wall light fixture.
2. Kitchen-Requires 1 working outlet and 1 permanently installed wall or ceiling fixture in working condition (a working outlet cannot substitute for a light fixture).

NOTE: Kitchens 50 square feet or less require 2 remote convenience outlets. Kitchens over 50 square feet require at least 3 separate and remote convenience outlets.

3. Bathroom-Requires a permanent light fixture in working condition, (an outlet cannot substitute for a permanent light fixture) and at least 1 receptacle outlet.
4. Bedroom or any other room used for sleeping-Requires 2 outlets or 1 outlet and 1 permanently installed light fixture.
5. All other rooms used for living-Require a means of natural or artificial illumination such as a light fixture, a wall outlet to serve as a lamp, a window in the room or adequate light from an adjacent room.

All outlets and light switches must have cover plates and cannot be cracked or damaged or have paint on them.

All bedroom light switches must be in same room that they service.

NOTE: The following items are not considered permanently installed light fixtures:

1. Table or floor lamps.
2. Ceiling lamps plugged into a socket.
3. Extension cords plugged into another plug.

#### 6. Range and Refrigerator

All units must have a range and a refrigerator in good working condition. Appliances are to be very clean and the gaskets in good condition.

## 7. Smoke Detectors

Each dwelling unit must include at least 1 battery operated or hard wired smoke detector in proper working condition on each level of the unit.

Smoke detector must be located in a hallway adjacent to a bedroom. They must be mounted on the ceiling at least 4 inches from a wall or on a wall with the top of the detector not less than 4 inches or more than 12 inches below the ceiling. Detectors may not be installed in kitchens, garages, or other spaces where the temperature can fall below 32 degrees F or exceed 100 degrees F.

NOTE: Units occupied by hearing-impaired persons must have smoke detectors designed for the hearing-impaired in each bedroom occupied by the hearing-impaired person.

## 8. Breaker or Fuse Box

Check to make sure that it has a cover and that there are no missing blanks or fuses.

- Breaker or fuse box must be accessible
- Padlocks on breaker box will FAIL unit if keys are not immediately accessible to tenant and owner.
- Breaker or fuse panel cannot be located in another unit nor can the unit contain panels from any other unit.

## 9. Windows

Every living and sleeping area must have a window with direct access to outside. Bathrooms must have a working window or a working exhaust fan.

- All windows which were designed to be operable must be in operating condition.
- All windows must be accessible for inspection and for an emergency exit.
- All windows must lock properly.
- All windows designed to open must have screens that are not damaged in any way.
- All window sashes must be in good condition, solid and intact and fit properly in the window frame. Damaged or deteriorating sashes must be replaced.

NOTE: A small crack in window pane is acceptable if no loose glass or sharp edges.

## 10. Light & Ventilation

Each habitable room within a dwelling or apartment shall have at least one window or skylight facing directly to the outdoors.

The minimum total window area for each habitable room shall be 8 percent of the floor area of the room. Whenever the only window in a room is a skylight type window in the top of the room, the total window area shall equal at least 15 percent of the total floor area of that room.

## **11. Laundry Area**

Every laundry area shall contain at least one grounded-type receptacle. Washing machines need 110 Amp receptacles and, if applicable, dryers need a 220 Amp.

## **12. Maintenance**

All buildings or structures and all parts shall be maintained in sound condition, good working order, and in safe and sanitary manner. Each building and structure shall be provided with a means of egress as required by the building code adopted by the City and that these required openings are not obstructed.

- All foundation walls, exterior walls and roofs shall be weather tight, water tight and rodent proof.
- Each window, exterior door and hatchway shall be weather tight, water tight, rodent proof, and insect proof.
- Each outside stair, porch appurtenance shall be safe to use and capable of supporting the load designed and contracted to serve.
- Each yard or public area shall be properly graded to obtain thorough drainage.
- Every sleeping room within a building or structure must be provided with 2 means of degrees.
- All exterior wiring must be protected by conduit.
- All exterior surfaces must be free from cracking, scaling, peeling, chipping, and loose paint or adequately treated or covered, regardless of whether the paint has been treated for lead content.
- A sidewalk or stepping stones must be provided from the front door to the curb of the driveway.
- Each unit must have house numbers that are visible from the street.
- Each fuel oil tank, if applicable, must be sound, secured and maintained in a level position.

## **13. Burglar Bars**

Burglar bars or other equipment or devices that obstruct the required openings must be capable of being opened from the inside without the use of separate keys or tools.

## **14. Hand Railings**

Railings are required on any unenclosed structure over 3 feet from ground level or any steps containing 4 or more risers.

## **15. Screens**

Garage, storage buildings, fences; buffer walls shall be maintained in good repair and sound structural condition and shall not be allowed to deteriorate to an unsound or unsightly appearance.

Each dwelling, dwelling unit and rooming house, shall be protected against mosquitoes, flies, and other insects and pests by providing each window with a screen. All other openings to the outside, excluding doors, which are used or intended to be used for ventilation shall be supplied with screens.

## **16. Accessory Structures**

Each occupant of a unit is responsible for the disposal of all garbage in a clean and sanitary manner by placing it in the garbage disposal facility or garbage container.

## **17. Housekeeping**

Each occupant of a unit is responsible for the disposal of all garbage in a clean and sanitary manner by placing in the garbage disposal facility or garbage container.

## **18. Yard & Outside Area**

Yards and outside areas must be free of all clutter and debris. Lawns and shrubs should be properly care for by the person(s) identified on the lease.

## **19. Space, Use, & Location**

Each dwelling unit shall contain at least 150 square feet of habitable floor area for the first occupant & at least 100 square feet if additional floor area for each additional occupant.

Each room for sleeping purposes shall contain at least 70 square feet of habitable floor area, with no horizontal dimension being less than 7 feet at the narrowest point. Every room occupied for sleeping by more than 1 occupant shall contain at least 50 square feet of additional habitable floor area for each occupant. Each bedroom must contain either a portable wardrobe or closet (including a clothes rod) for the proper hanging and storage of clothes. Each bedroom should have a door.

## **20. Peeling Paint**

No peeling paint should be anywhere inside or outside the unit. Surface is to be scraped and repainted with 2 coats if non-lead based paints.

## **21. Water Supply System**

Water supply must be connected to an approval public or private system. If it is a private system, the owner will be asked whether the well has been tested and whether it was approved.

## **22. Sewer System**

The unit must be connected to an approved public or private system. If private system is used, owner will be asked the type of system. Inspector will determine whether it meets local health and safety standards. Evidence of serious sewer back-up would warrant a **FAIL** rating.



### **23. Bathroom**

- A. Each unit must have a bathroom for the exclusive, private use of the tenant and be connected to a hot and cold running water supply and contain a sink, toilet, tub, and/or shower in proper working order.
- B. The primary bathroom must contain a toilet paper holder, a medicine cabinet or shelf, a vanity mirror, and a shower rod (if a shower is present). The primary bathroom must also contain a toothbrush holder, soap dish and adequate towel bars in relation to the number of occupants.
- C. The tub/shower unit must be adequately caulked or grouted and secured. The walls must be free of any hazards such as broken or jagged edges and should be impervious to water, if a shower is present.
- D. Each toilet must have a toilet tank cover. The toilet seat must be free of any hazards. The porcelain of all bathroom fixtures must be clean and free of major stains.
- E. All plumbing holes must be sealed.

### **24. Kitchen**

- A. Each kitchen must contain an oven and stove (or range) with all parts in proper working order.
- B. Each unit must contain a properly working refrigerator of appropriate size for the unit. All refrigerator parts in order and accessories should be present and in good working order, including shelves, vegetable bins, and covers, etc.
- C. Each kitchen must contain a sink with hot and cold running water and with any approved drain and gas trap.
- D. All plumbing holes in walls and floors must be sealed.
- E. Each unit must have space for food storage and preparation. The countertop surface adjacent to the sink must be impervious to water and free of paper-based covering (such as adhesive-backed paper) and should have a back splash.
- F. The kitchen floor must be sound, free from hazardous defects and impervious to water with covering such as tile or linoleum.

### **25. Mobile Homes**

If the unit is a mobile home, it must be properly placed and tied down and have at least one (1) smoke detector in working condition.

### **26. General Health and Safety**

- The access to the unit may not be gained through another unit.
- The unit must have adequate covered facilities for temporary storage and disposal of wastes.
- All elevators must display a current inspection certificate (or date of last inspection verified by owner) and must be operating safely and properly.
- The unit must be free from abnormally high levels of air pollution from vehicular exhaust, sewer gas, fuel gas, dust or other pollutants.
- The site and immediate neighborhood must be free from conditions that would seriously and continuously endanger the health and/or safety of the residents.
- Each unit must have an individual mailbox for the exclusive private use of the tenant.