

## **Think fire safety before you rent**

*Ask questions and know what to look for when touring rental suites*

When looking for a new rental to call home, the eye tends to focus on the obvious: the condition of the floors, the dripping faucet, the beautiful shower, the renovated kitchen. But it's important to think about fire safety when considering your rental choice. Getting out of your suite safely in the event of an emergency is more important than a rainfall-simulating showerhead.

Here are a few things to consider when touring rental suites.

### **Overall building**

Are there sprinklers in the suites or only in common areas? Are there fire extinguishers in common areas? Are there clearly marked, unblocked fire exits? Is there a working fire alarm system? Is there evidence of routine fire alarm maintenance and an annual certificate of inspection? The property manager should be able to answer your questions and explain safety procedures in the building. Note, however, that even though the building has safety procedures, you will still need to come up with your own home escape plan if you decide to rent the unit.

### **Look for smoke alarms**

There must be at least one smoke alarm in an apartment as a minimum requirement, but more is better, especially if you have a multi-level unit like a townhouse. Ask if they're new or are replaced every 10 years, if they're connected to the larger building's fire alarm system, and what to do if there's a nuisance alarm – because who hasn't burned the toast at least once?

### **What's allowed and what isn't**

Ask the landlord or property manager questions about what is and isn't permitted in the suites, on balconies and in the building common areas. Some buildings explicitly ban smoking in all parts of the building, including suites, while others only ban smoking in common areas. Some have restrictions on portable space heaters, and some prohibit or carefully control barbecue use on balconies. Solid fuel (charcoal, wood, wood pellet) appliances are not allowed on balconies. Consider these factors in your decision and check the lease to ensure the rules are spelled out in the same way the property manager explained them to you.

### **Second way out**

If you're touring a suite, always consider your second way out. Not only should the entryway be clear of obstacles and easy to navigate, but there should be at least one window with an opening large enough to evacuate through. If there are security bars on the window, they should be easily removable from the inside in case you need to leave in a hurry.

### **Your own unique circumstances**

If you have mobility issues or can't easily navigate stairs or narrow hallways on your own in an emergency, consider suites that will be easier to get out of in the event of a fire. A ground floor unit could reduce your reliance on an elevator in an emergency, and make it easier for you to find a second way out through a patio door. Be aware of your own unique mobility situation and consider how it may impact your ability to leave the building.