

City of Kalamazoo

Rental Registration and Certification Program

Frequently Asked Questions (& Answers!)

Q: What is Rental Registration?

A: Rental Registration is the process of filling out a form, called an Application for Rental Registration, for properties that are to be rented. The Application for Rental Registration provides information on the owner and the designated local agent who will be managing the property. The owner and/or agent is responsible to keep the property in compliance with city codes and obtain a Certificate of Compliance. A new rental registration form must be completed any time information about the owner or local agent changes...even just a phone number. There is a form available online to do this at:



www.kalamazoo.org/rentalregistration

Q: What rental properties need to be registered?

A: The simple answer to this is “all of them”. Every rental property, from a single-family house up through the largest hotel, must be registered as a rental and have periodic inspections for certification.

Q: How do I obtain a Certificate of Compliance?



A: A Certificate of Compliance (or certification) occurs after a property passes inspection by a city housing inspector. Any violations that are cited by the inspector at an initial inspection must be repaired and checked during a reinspection prior to certification.

Q: How long is the Certificate of Compliance valid?

A: The initial (first) certificate on every property is good for 28 months. When renewal is necessary, the standard renewal period is also 28 months. However, properties that receive renewal prior to certificate expiration and meet several other criteria, may receive a 40-month certificate, or possibly a 52-month certificate for exceptionally maintained properties with at least two previous 40-month certificates. Underperforming properties, or properties excessively delinquent in renewing their certificates, may receive a 16-month certificate.



Q: I received a Conditional Certificate – what does that mean?

A: A Conditional Certificate may be granted when there are exterior violations that need correction, but weather prevents them from being accomplished. Additionally, a small number of interior items that are not life safety in nature and/or issues being repaired under a permit may be included. A Conditional Certificate will have a date by which the violations must be corrected and will list the violations on the certificate document. You do not need to contact the city if you only have exterior repairs, as inspectors will automatically inspect the exterior violations after the due date. **If you need any additional time, it is vital you contact the inspector PRIOR TO THE VIOLATIONS DUE DATE to request additional time in order to avoid enforcement.** The inspection fee to clear a conditional certificate is \$25.

Q: What costs are associated with rental registration?

A: There are a couple different fee types associated with rental registration and certification. An Annual Rental Registration, billed each March (for the period of April 1-March 31) is currently \$120 plus \$1.50 per unit (\$121.50 for a single family dwelling).



Additionally, inspections and reinspections are invoiced as they take place, and are currently \$85 per unit. There is an incentive to have certificate renewal inspections and any reinspections take place prior to certificate expiration as the discounted cost is approximately a third less (currently \$58). There are no free reinspections. Additional costs may be incurred if enforcement becomes necessary for failure to renew the certificate prior to expiration or failure to make repairs after a correction notice is issued. Each Enforcement Letter comes with a \$75 cost recovery fee and may be issued up to every 14 days.

Q: What is the certificate guarantee all about?

A: The certificate guarantee is basically a guarantee that **IF** certain criteria are met, the property owner may still qualify for a longer certificate -- even if the city, due to inspector availability, is not able to schedule an inspection prior to the current certificate expiration date. Please refer to the Certificate Guarantee at www.kalamazoo.org/rental for more information. The basics are this: schedule your renewal inspection as early as possible but between 120 days and 90 days before the current certificate expires; **AND** if a reinspection



is necessary after the initial inspection, schedule the reinspection within 10 days of the correction notice. Additional criteria must be met as outlined in the inspection rules (also available on the website), but meeting these two criteria is a **MUST!**

Q: How do I schedule an inspection?

A: By calling 269-337-8000 (311 from inside city) or emailing rentalinspection@kalamazocity.org

Q: I have heard that if I have my family living in the rental unit, it is not required to be registered or certified.

A: It is true that immediate family may live in a property and it is not considered a rental. This includes children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters (and their families). Other extended family is NOT considered immediate family (cousins, aunts, uncles, great grandnephew, brother's ex-wife's cousin, etc.).

Q: What if I am a homeowner and have roommates?



A: If you have roommates your property is considered a rental and must be registered and certified. There are exceptions to this, however, for functional families, life partners and co-owners (both persons on the deed/title to the house).

Q: I've heard I can only rent out my place to two or three people, is this true?

A: It depends on where your house is located. Certain zoning districts, particularly single-family residential areas, do have occupancy limits. If you are in a single-family district and are a landlord and will be renting your dwelling, the occupants must be a family, or not more than two unrelated individuals. If you, as the owner, live in the house you may have two additional unrelated persons besides yourself. If you need any information on what zoning district your dwelling is located in or if there are applicable occupancy limits, please call 337-8000 and ask to talk to the Zoning Inspector.

Q: During the inspection, what are you looking for?

A: The inspector is inspecting the property against requirements of the International Property Maintenance Code plus several local addendums. Links to these requirements, as well as an inspection “cheat sheet”, can be found on the city’s website: www.kalamazoo.org/rental



Q: Do I need to be present for the inspection?

A: Either the property owner or property agent (or another representative, i.e. maintenance worker, leasing agent) need to be present at the inspection. Do not rely on the occupant to provide access but be sure to provide proper notice of the inspection to the occupant or you may be charged a cancellation fee.

Q: What if you find violations during the inspection?

A: If the inspector cites any violations, you will receive a Correction Notice. A Correction Notice typically provides 30 days to make repairs. If the property is occupied and any safety items are found, they should be remedied within five days. Work with your inspector if there are any special circumstances.

Q: What is a condemnation?

A: A condemnation means that the dwelling is not fit for human habitation. The reasons can be varied and can be temporary or long term. For example, if the water is allowed to be shut off, or the furnace isn’t working in the winter, the house may be condemned. Also, certain structural problems, or sanitary issues could also result in a condemnation. A condemnation may be lifted when the conditions resulting in the condemnation have been confirmed remedied by a city inspector.

Q: My tenants have caused damage to the rental unit; will you condemn my unit to get them out quicker?

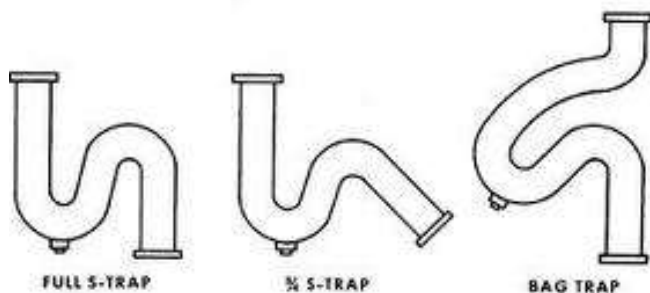


A: When the city condemns a unit it is due **ONLY** to the condition of the unit. Landlords must file evictions through the court system if tenants refuse to leave after a condemnation has been issued and/or if they want tenants removed for any other legitimate reason.

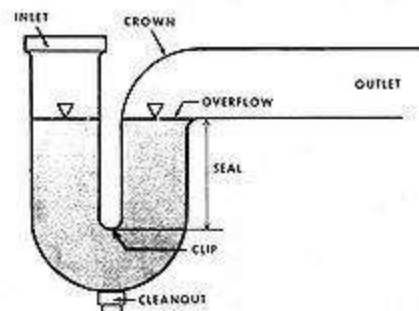
Q: Why do I have to replace the drain (trap) under my sink to a P-trap? It's not leaking.

A: Many older homes were constructed when S-traps were standard. However, the plumbing code has prohibited S-traps, and a variety of other illegal traps, for many years. Unfortunately, home improvement stores still sell replacement S-traps, and there have been many illegal S-traps installed. Unaware homeowners, and even plumbers, often just replace what had been there before. Homeowners can repair their own drain, and a permit is not required for such a simple repair, however the S-trap must be converted to a P-trap when repair is needed. S-traps allow syphoning of the trap water, and allow sewer gasses into the living space. If city inspectors find any S-traps that are not original to the structure – they will need to be replaced.

Variety of Illegal Traps



P-Trap



Q: Where are smoke detectors required?

A: Smoke detectors are required in the following locations:

- All bedrooms
- All rooms other than bedrooms used for permanent sleeping
- In each hallway outside of a bedroom or group of bedrooms
- One on each floor (basement included)
- Attics only if used for approved living space



**Smoke Alarms
Save lives !**

Q: Is a Carbon Monoxide (CO) detector required?

A: CO detectors are now required in all existing structures that meet certain conditions.

Existing Structures: Carbon monoxide detectors will be required in dwelling units and sleeping units if one or more of the following conditions exist:

- If there is a fuel burning appliance (gas stove, dryer, water heater, etc.)
- If there is a fuel burning fireplace
- If there is a fuel burning forced air furnace
- If the dwelling unit has an attached private garage

Type Required: Carbon monoxide detectors may be stand-alone (not interconnected) and/or battery operated or plug-in.

Where Required: Carbon monoxide detectors must be placed:

- Outside each bedroom/sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of the bedrooms
- Inside a bedroom or sleeping room if there is a fuel burning appliance in the bedroom or in an attached bathroom
- In a sleeping unit – required unless sleeping room is not served by gas fired furnace and does not contain a fuel fired appliance.



Q: The tenants have removed the hardwired smoke detectors. Can I replace them with battery operated smoke detectors?

A: Once hardwired smoke detectors are installed they must be maintained, or if replaced remain, interconnected. All building codes require interconnected smoke detectors. Interconnected means when one goes off (say in the basement due to furnace fire) they all go off. There are now wireless options available (only the base unit has to be hardwired), or even fully battery operated units. It is recommended you cover tampering and removal of smoke detectors in the lease agreement. If you have any questions on types of detectors allowed, contact the building department at 269-337-8000.

Q: Are window screens required?



A: All openable windows must be provided with tight fitting screens. The code requires that screens be available from April 15 to October 31. Between November 1 and April 14, they may be stored. It is recommended you cover tampering of/damage to screens in the lease agreement.

Q: Why can't my tenant set up a bedroom in the basement?

A: Older basements were typically not constructed to be habitable space. There are specific requirements for a basement to be habitable, and even more requirements if it is to be used as a bedroom. Requirements include natural light, natural ventilation, ceiling height, separation from utilities, and a bedroom egress window. Consult with your housing inspector to see if your basement is habitable. Some basements that were converted to "living space" by owner occupants find out that the habitable standards are not met when the property is converted to rental.

Q: My house has bed bugs – what do I do?

A: Bed bugs are NOT regulated by a city code and the city inspectors do NOT inspect for bed bugs. Bed bugs are not necessarily a sign of filthy living conditions and are not known to carry communicable disease. Bed bugs are an annoyance for persons who are sensitive to their bites, but not everyone reacts. Bed bugs are very mobile, and can originate from anywhere and can be brought in on clothing, luggage, furniture or other items. Further, they can go for extremely long times without feeding (biting). If you believe your unit has bedbugs, you must work with your tenant and call a professional exterminator to deal with the issue.



We hope your question was answered. If not, feel free to send a question to: kzoorentalprogram@kalamazoocity.org