



# **Resident Handbook**

Dartmouth Housing

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## *Welcome*

### **Welcome to Dartmouth Housing**

In this booklet you will find useful information on our organization and how it operates, resident and landlord rights and responsibilities and available community support services. It covers information on what to expect living here, what your rights are and what we expect from you. More detailed information is written in your tenancy agreement which is a legal document, so you should be familiar with its contents.

### ***A Brief History of Dartmouth Housing***

Dartmouth Housing (Dartmouth Non-Profit Housing Society) was incorporated in 1981. It resulted from the efforts of a concerned group of citizens and city staff in Dartmouth who recognized the need for affordable housing of families. With the support of the federal, provincial and municipal governments the organization became a reality. Dartmouth Housing comprises 109 units and has as a mandate to provide safe, affordable housing for low and middle income families. The organization operates on revenues from resident rent payments and a subsidy from government. An operating agreement with the government spells out the rules and regulations that oversee our operations.

Dartmouth Housing is operated by a staff under the direction of a volunteer Board of Directors. The Board is responsible for supervising and monitoring the financial operations of Dartmouth Housing including adhering to operating agreement with government, approves its policies and legal contracts and ensures that the organization is properly maintained.

The organization operates on a non-profit basis which means that rental income, plus the government subsidy is designed to cover operating costs, such as maintenance, administration, insurance, property tax and mortgage payments.

***Important Contacts / Phone Numbers***

<b>Dartmouth Housing Office:</b> Is responsible for maintenance, correspondence, rent, applications, etc	<b>902-469-0543</b>
<b>24-Hour Emergency Maintenance:</b> I.e. electrical, flooding, sewage backup, no heat	<b>902-469-0543: Listen to voicemail for current emergency phone number</b>
<b>Fire, Police, Ambulance:</b>	<b>911</b>
<b>Non-Emergency Police:</b>	<b>902-490-5020</b>
<b>Municipal Services and Information</b> I.e. bylaw complaints, garbage collection	<b>311</b>
<b>Halifax Water:</b>	<b>902-420-9287</b>
<b>NS Power:</b>	<b>902-428-6230</b>
<b>Ultramar:</b>	<b>902-468-7979 contact: Bill Kelvey</b>
<b>Cable TV Phone:</b>	

## ***Moving In***

### **Tenancy Agreement**

Prior to moving in you will be required to sign a tenancy agreement. Our Executive Director or Administrative Assistant will review the terms of the tenancy agreement with you and answer any of your questions.

### **Move in inspection**

When you receive your keys, our Executive Director will do an inspection of your new home with you. Any problems with the unit will be written down on the inspection report and a copy of the report will be kept in your tenant file at the office. An inspection will also take place when you move out of the unit. This way we can keep track of the condition of the unit.

### **Locks and keys**

Before you move in, Dartmouth Housing will put a new lock on your door. You will receive a key for your unit, and if applicable, the front door of the building and your mailbox. If you lose any of these keys, we must charge a fee for replacement.

If you want to change your lock, we can do this for you. A fee will be charged to cover our staff time and the cost of a new cylinder. Any additional locks must be approved by the Executive Director.

Leaving a spare key with a trusted neighbour or friend is the best way to avoid being locked out of your home. If you lose your key during working hours, call the office and we will let you into your unit. If you lock yourself out after working hours, you will have to call a locksmith.

The keys to your unit are for the sole use of the tenant and/or other persons residing in the unit. Copying of additional keys to the building or rental unit for anyone other than the tenant or other occupant is not permitted.

### **Cable TV**

Dartmouth Housing does not provide cable/ telephone or internet. You must contact a cable provider yourself regarding cable hook up.

### **Storage (Apartments)**

All storage spaces are to remain unlocked if not in use. The following items may not be stored within a storage locker:

- Food or perishable items.
- Any living thing
- Used tires
- Waste or material for recycle
- Firearms
- Explosives, flammables of any kind. (gas, diesel, kerosene, oil, paint, etc.)
- Drugs or drug paraphernalia
- Hazardous items, hazardous waste material of any kind.

- Items that produce odors of any kind
- Any item which detrimentally affects other tenants or the facility

Personal property is not permitted to be in any areas outside the unit or storage locker.

### **Snow Removal and Lawn Care**

The yard around your unit is your responsibility and you need to cut the grass and do any weeding on a regular basis. It is your responsibility to remove snow from walks in front of your unit. The property must be free of garbage at all times.

### **Redecorating**

You cannot apply paint or wallpaper on your unit walls without the approval of the Executive Director.

### **Installing ceiling fans or air conditioners**

Any installation of ceiling fans, air conditioners or other electrical fixtures or wired-in appliances must be approved by the Executive Director and inspected by NS Power at your expense.

### **Insurance**

Dartmouth Housing is not responsible for your personal property. Our insurance covers our property only. Dartmouth Housing is only responsible for damage to your personal property if it is proven to be caused by negligence on our part. The Tenant is required to maintain Tenants Insurance Coverage (which should include Tenants Legal Liability). Tenants insurance is designed to protect your belongings.

### **Outdoor taps**

Turn off the tap inside and drain the water from the pipe before the winter. If you are not sure how to do this, please contact our office.

### **Pets**

Pets are not allowed in your units.

### **Smoking**

Your unit is smoke-free. This includes (but not limited to) tobacco/cigarettes, vaporizers/e-cigarettes and cannabis.

## ***Fire Safety/ Smoke/C02 Alarm***

Avoid storing flammable materials or liquids such as gasoline, paint thinner or solvents in your home. Recycle your old newspapers; they become a fire hazard if you let them accumulate.

The most common causes of fire are: 1) Smoking in bed 2) Grease fires on a stove and 3) Disposal of lighted cigarette ashes in the garbage. If you hear the fire alarm, exit your unit immediately. Never assume it is a false alarm.

Dartmouth Housing provides information to fire fighters about whom in the unit needs assistance to exit because of mobility problems and who might have a medical condition which could increase their need for assistance, for example use of oxygen. If you think you fall into this category, please advise use.

Most fatal fires occur at night when people are asleep. Often, victims never wake up. A working smoke alarm will detect smoke and sound an alarm to alert you, giving you precious time to escape. Every home must have a working smoke alarm on every storey and outside all sleeping areas. If the unit is heated by a furnace then there must be a C02 detector combined with the smoke alarm outside of all sleeping areas and near the furnace.

**Tenants-** If you are a tenant of a rental property and do not have the required number of smoke alarms, contact our office (902) 469-0543. It is against the law for tenants to remove the batteries or tamper with the alarm in any way other than to maintain the smoke alarm. Steam from the shower or cooking in the oven, stove or toaster can cause smoke alarms to activate. If these alarms occur, **do not remove the battery.**

**Test smoke alarms monthly-** Test your smoke alarms every month by using the test button on the alarm. When the test button is pressed, the alarm should sound. If it fails to sound, make sure that the battery is installed correctly or install a new battery. If the alarm still fails to sound, replace the smoke alarm with a new one.

**Change the batteries every year-** Install a new battery at least once a year, or as recommended by the manufacturer. Install a new battery if the low-battery warning sounds or if the alarm fails to sound when tested.

**Vacuum alarms annually-** Dust can clog your smoke alarms. Battery-powered smoke alarms should be cleaned by opening the cover of the alarm and gently vacuuming the inside with a soft bristle brush. For electrically-connected smoke alarms, shut off the power to the unit, and then gently vacuum the outside vents of the alarm only. Turn the power back on and test the alarm.

**Replace older smoke alarms-** All smoke alarms wear out. Replace smoke alarms according to manufacturers' recommendations. We have an inventory of smoke detectors at the office.

**Plan your escape-** Make sure that everyone knows the sound of the smoke alarm and what to do if it activates. Create an escape plan with the entire household and practice it. Make sure your

plan identifies two ways out of each room, if possible, and a meeting place outside. Once outside, stay outside. Never re-enter a burning building. Call the fire department from a neighbour's phone.

## ***Repairs***

For all maintenance requests, call the office at (902) 469-0543.

Please report water stains that appear on the walls and ceiling.

There is no charge for repair due to normal wear and tear. However, any damage you, your visitors, or your children cause will be charged to you.

Dartmouth Housing is responsible for preparing and authorizing the charge for any repair of damage. If you have any questions about a charged repair, you should discuss them with the Executive Director.

Any modifications to the unit must be discussed with and approved by Dartmouth Housing.

## **Emergency maintenance**

After working hours and on weekends, there is an Emergency Maintenance number you can phone, 902-469-0543. You will hear an answering machine that tells you what number to call to get help.

Call this number only in a serious emergency, such as flood, power failure to the whole unit, no heat, or when someone's safety is at immediate risk.

## **Notice of entry**

We shall give you at least 24 hours notice if we are coming to do repairs or an inspection of your home, unless it is an emergency situation.

## **Inspections**

We try to inspect all our units each year. From the inspection reports we prepare our maintenance plans for the next year and prepare our annual maintenance budget. We will send out notices of the inspection schedule before we come into your unit.

## **Vandalism**

If you see anyone damaging Dartmouth Housing property, you should phone the police right away and call the office. Often vandals cause damage to stairwells and hallways that are expensive to repair. Increased costs often mean increased rents.

Please remember that children must not play in hallways or laundry rooms. If your children keep bikes in the apartment, please make sure they do not ride them in the hallways. Scratches are costly to repair and skid marks cannot be removed. You are legally responsible for any damage caused by your children.



## ***Paying Your Rent***

In Dartmouth Housing units residents pay “rent-geared-to-income”, also called RGI.

### **Rent-geared-to-income**

Rent-geared-to-income (RGI) is subsidized rent. A tenant paying rent-geared-to-income will pay rent equal to about 30% of the combined income of everyone living in the home, plus some additional charges for utilities. The government sets the rules for how RGI is calculated.

### **RGI rent increases and decreases**

If you are paying rent-geared-to-income, your rent will change when your income changes. This will happen once a year. We do a review of your income and household size each year. You will be required under the terms of the lease to provide updated proof of income and a list of who is living with you at that time. However, you must let us know immediately during the year if there is any change in your household members as a result of birth, death, marriage (including common-law), separation or divorce, or when your children move out. These changes can affect your rent as well as initiate a review of your current living accommodations related to downsizing of your accommodations to better meet the demands for housing within Dartmouth Housing.

If you have any questions about how your rent is calculated, or what proof of income is required, please contact the office.

### ***When to pay***

#### **How to pay**

You must pay your rent by automatic withdrawal. Please do not pay by cash.

#### **Late Rent Payments**

Dartmouth Housing requires tenants pay their rent on the first of each month.

## ***Utilities***

In addition to your rent, most tenants are responsible for paying for the cost of utilities directly to the utility companies.

### ***Reducing Utility Bills***

#### **Energy saving tips**

- lower your thermostat to 16°C at night and when you are not at home
- use a microwave oven, toaster oven or slow cooker to cook small portions
- remember it takes approximately only 10 minutes for your stove oven to reach 350°F
- keep seals around refrigerator, microwave and freezer doors clean and in good repair
- consider switching to energy efficient fluorescent bulbs
- turn off all lights when they are not needed
- call our office about energy efficient shower heads
- take showers instead of baths
- use an electric kettle or coffee maker instead of a stove-top burner
- ensure the heating units in your home are clean and that there is nothing in front of them
- wash your clothes in warm or cold water and rinse in cold; wait until you have a full load or use the small loads setting (if available) on the washing machine
- keep windows closed in the winter, both the inside and outside storm windows.
- report any broken windows
- if the refrigerator in your unit is a manual defrost appliance, defrost your refrigerator on a regular basis and keep it at a medium or low setting.
- report dripping taps

If you have condensation problems (water running down your window on cold days):

- vent moisture out of your home using the bathroom or kitchen fan;
- buy a dehumidifier
- make sure to vent the bathroom with the fan when you shower.

If the problem is uncontrollable, please call our office.

## *Privacy, Harassment and Other Matters*

### **Privacy, confidentiality and freedom of information**

Dartmouth Housing takes very seriously its responsibility regarding the collection, use or disclosure of personal information on residents, staff and Directors of the society. Dartmouth Housing complies with the federal Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act to ensure that such information is treated confidentially and is used for intended purposes only. For example, only necessary information can be collected; and no personal information can be shared with anyone, without permission, unless it is necessary for law enforcement proceedings, or on compelling health (to facilitate health or safety) or compassionate grounds (to contact next of kin or a friend who is injured, ill or deceased).

Residents have the right to see all personal information in file and have the right to request a correction of any errors or to have additional clarifying information added to the file.

Dartmouth Housing has a confidentiality policy that defines “personal information” and describes how we collect, protect, use and dispose of this information. Staff with access to personal information must sign a Confidentiality Agreement that commits them to the proper use of any such information.

A copy of this policy is available in the office.

## ***Harassment***

If you are harassed by staff or by other tenants and cannot resolve the situation with the offender, you should report the harassment to the Executive Director of Dartmouth Housing. Do so in writing, if you can, and keep a copy for yourself. Write down every incident, including the place, date and time the harassment took place, and details of the harassment.

When we receive a harassment complaint, Dartmouth Housing will make every effort to correct it. You also have the option of taking your complaint to the Human Rights Commission or a lawyer at any time. Dartmouth Housing will tell you immediately if it sends your complaint to the Human Rights Commission.

## **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence and abuse are criminal offences. If you witness abuse, if you think a neighbour is being abused, or if you are being abused yourself, call the police.

## **Drug Free Housing Strategy**

Dartmouth Housing is committed to creating and maintaining a high quality of life and so takes a hard stand against illegal drug use and drug trafficking. We work closely with the police to keep illegal drug use and trafficking out of our buildings.

Neither the police nor we can control illegal drug activity without your help. You can assist in the campaign against the illegal drug trade by reporting any information concerning drugs by calling Crime Stoppers. When calling this service you do not need to identify yourself and the confidentiality of any information you supply is guaranteed. Residents found directly involved in illegal drug activity, or permitting illegal activity to occur in their homes, will face immediate eviction proceedings.

**Privacy - Noise Transmission**

Residents are reminded to respect your neighbours' right to privacy and enjoyment of their homes by keeping noise at a low level. Excessive noise is contrary to the terms of your tenancy agreement.

If you are faced with what you feel is an unreasonable noise situation, discuss the matter with someone in our office. Keep a written record of the time and nature of the disturbances. Continued problems should be directed to the attention of the Executive Director in writing. This will result in action to remedy the problem. Excessive noise is a cause for eviction; if there have been repeated offences.

**If you have a complaint**

All complaints must be sent to us in writing. This includes complaints about other tenants and Dartmouth Housing staff. If you have a complaint about a repair that has been done in your home, please contact the Executive Director. These All written complaints will be followed up.

**Transfers**

If you would like to move to another Dartmouth Housing unit, keep in mind that you will be placed on a waiting list according to our internal transfer policy. To apply for a transfer please call the office.

Some people have priority for transfer:

- tenants living in a unit too large under RGI rules
- tenants who must move because they need a wheel-chair accessible, or other type of unit in order to continue to live independently
- if your life is in danger where you are living now (due to violence or abuse, for example).

## ***Housekeeping***

It is Dartmouth Housings responsibility to maintain the building and keep it safe and secure. It is your responsibility to keep the inside of your home clean and safe. We expect tenants take pride in their homes and make an effort to keep it clean and tidy too.

### **Appliances**

Regular cleaning and defrosting will keep your refrigerator in good shape and save energy. When cleaning the smooth surfaces of your appliances, use a mild soapy solution. A paste made of baking soda and water is good for cleaning off grease and dirt. Do not use rough cleansers because these will damage the surface of the appliance. Use a commercial oven cleaner for your oven.

### **Bathrooms**

Please do not use rough cleansers like Old Dutch, or Comet, on bathtubs, sinks and toilets. They scratch the surface and make them harder to keep clean. A good liquid or paste cleanser will prevent mildew from forming on tiles and porcelain.

### **Pets**

Pets are not permitted.

### **Pests**

To control mice and rats, keep garbage and food in tightly closed hard containers, block any holes in porches or foundations, trim grass and shrubs near the building, keep basement drains covered. Peanut butter and raisins make good bait for mousetraps.

### **Boric acid:**

- kills cockroaches on contact;
- is sprinkled under kitchen cabinets, stoves and refrigerators
- must be kept away from food, children and animals
- can be found in drug stores

### **Sinks**

Please do not pour grease down the sink. It coats the inside of the pipe and eventually plugs it up completely. Metal coffee cans make good alternate storage for grease. Hair and coffee grounds can also be death to a drain system.

### **Bathroom exhaust fans**

Please turn the bathroom exhaust fan on when you shower. The moisture from the shower can cause mildew and damage to your drywall if it is not vented. 20 minutes is a reasonable time to leave a bathroom fan on after you are done your shower.

### **Light bulbs/ Electrical Fuses/ Furnace Air Filters**

Supplying and changing light bulbs, electrical fuses and furnace air filters in your unit is your responsibility.

## ***Moving Out***

### **30 days notice**

When you decide to move out and are on a month-to-month lease, you must give at least thirty days notice with your last day falling on the last day of the month. Fixed term leases expire on the date stated in the lease, we will contact you before the expiration date to discuss renewing. There will be a moving out inspection of your unit to assess its condition and any unusual damages.

### **Notice in writing**

To give notice, you must do so in writing. Email is not an acceptable.

### **Exit survey**

When we receive your notice to vacate, we may give you an exit survey to fill out. The survey gives us feedback on how good a job we are doing as a landlord. Please take a few minutes to fill it out and return it to the office.