



To encourage resident assistance with preventive maintenance, try this creative incentive.

REWARDING RESIDENT RESPONSE

BY NICHOLAS A. DUNLAP, CPM

Preventive maintenance can be a manager's best friend. After all, unplanned maintenance expenses can have tremendous impact on a community's operating budget. Any management company that has called its ownership clients to explain the reasoning behind a significant variance in budget knows the warmth with which the call is typically received.

Through maintenance personnel and onsite representation, managers try to prevent large, unplanned expenses by remediating and resolving smaller issues as they arise. Of course, the key component in this equation is one variable: resident communications.

Ensuring residents are prompt in reporting their maintenance issues to onsite personnel is critical to a community's overall success and to the manager's adherence to budget. Consider adopting a "Reward to Report" program that encourages the timely reporting of sensitive maintenance issues.

Pay Now or Pay Later

An 80-unit building comprised of all two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment homes has a total of 240 sets of angle stops (the shut-off valves between water pipes and a faucet). Even with the most efficient management staff and diligent maintenance crew, it is a fairly safe bet that at least one of those angle stops is either leaking now, was leaking or will continue to leak and cause damage to the surrounding cabinetry or drywall. Worse yet, it could erode the drywall, drip through the wall and wreak havoc on the unit below.

At the various stages of the problem, the cost to repair the damage escalates from \$15 to as much as \$250. How unfortunate is it to be burdened with a \$235 discrepancy as the result of a resident's negligence? Of course, the manager also must inconvenience other residents by shutting off water for up to several hours while a technician replaces the angle stops. Had the resident reported the issue upon first sight, the problem would have been solved, saving \$250. True, \$250 is small potatoes for an 80-unit community, but a \$250 angle stop replacement and

Residents often fail to report maintenance issues for the strangest of reasons. Some feel that their rent will be raised, some feel that they are causing a nuisance and some simply do not want outside eyes inside their apartment.

drywall repair can grow into a \$2,500 mold claim nightmare.


Residents often fail to report maintenance issues for the strangest of reasons. Some feel that their rent will be raised, some feel that they are causing a nuisance and some simply do not want outside eyes inside their apartment. Whatever the case, helping residents to embrace maintenance on the property and inside apartment homes can require skillful marketing and planning. When done creatively, the campaign can become a win-win for ownership, management and residents alike.

Report the Problem, It Gets Repaired

Resident interaction starts in the leasing office. Residents and management correspond on a seemingly routine basis every month as rent is paid. Have the leasing staff ask residents as they pay if they can think of anything in need of maintenance inside their apartment.

The reason? Well, the community is sponsoring a drawing in which one attentive resident who notifies management of an issue that they can fix before the item becomes a larger problem will be entered into a drawing to win a \$100 gift card to a popular local restaurant or nearby retail store. It truly is that easy. Report the problem, it gets repaired and you are entered into a monthly drawing to win a gift card.

Most maintenance techs are well-versed in their craft and will be able to spot the slightest signs of skullduggery—such as damage inflicted by residents simply to enter the contest. In other words, cross that bridge when you come to it.

By establishing a program such as the "Reward to Report" campaign, managers can protect ownership from elevated expenses while caring for their residents' concerns, essentially rewarding them for helping themselves. That's a true win-win. 



Nicholas Dunlap, CPM, is Vice President of Dunlap Property Group, an AMO Firm, based in Fullerton, Calif. He can be reached at ndunlap@dpgre.com.