

Renter Beware: Ten Ways Unscrupulous Landlords Cheat NYC Tenants

Tell us your experiences with NYC rents at bit.ly/pp-rent-survey

What They Do	What You Can Do
Make up a fake “legal” rent they claim to be a maximum they can charge you.	Request a copy of your rent history from the state at bit.ly/pp-rent1 . If you see any big jumps in the legal rent, that may be a red flag.
Boost “preferential” rents to “legal” maximums just to force you out.	Check your leases to see if you really do have a “preferential” rent, and if so, get your rent history and share it with a tenant lawyer to see if the “legal” maximum is indeed legal. A list of tenants’ rights groups is available at bit.ly/pp-rent2 .
Refuse to offer rent-stabilized tenants a renewal lease, as required by law.	State law entitles rent-stabilized tenants to a renewal lease. If you were not given one, you can complain to the state at bit.ly/pp-rent3 .
Falsely claim that the apartment isn’t rent stabilized, even though it is.	A rent history will indicate “RS” for rent stabilized units. If the “RS” is missing even though it should be there, you should talk to a tenant attorney. If you determine you were charged more than you should have been, you can file an overcharge complaint at bit.ly/pp-rent4 .
Refuse to repair apartments.	Refusal to maintain any apartment in habitable condition is a breach of the warranty of habitability, which is illegal. Talk to a tenant lawyer or, if you are a rent-stabilized tenant, you can file a harassment complaint at bit.ly/pp-rent5 .
Add legal fees to your rent bill.	A landlord needs a court order to impose legal fees on you. Rent-stabilized tenants can refuse to pay legal fees and continue to pay their rent and can’t be evicted for doing so. Also, a landlord cannot take you to housing court just for refusing to pay legal fees. Read more about legal fees at bit.ly/pp-rent6 .
Charge you more in security deposit or late fees than allowed by law.	For rent-stabilized tenants, security deposits are capped at one month’s rent. Late fees are capped at 5 percent of the rent. File an overcharge complaint at bit.ly/pp-rent4 .
Frequently claim MCIs – “major capital improvements” – just to increase rents by a fraction of the work done.	Not all work done to the building qualifies as an MCI. Read more at bit.ly/pp-rent7 about how to challenge spurious MCI rent increases.
Refuse to supply heat in the winter.	New York City landlords are required to supply heat from Oct. 1 through May 31. If you are not getting adequate heat, call 311 to complain.
Fail to disclose when a “421-a” tax break from the city will expire, taking the apartment out of rent stabilization.	The landlord has an obligation to disclose this information in every lease and renewal lease. If you are not informed, you may be entitled to a rent-stabilized lease even after the tax break ends. You can file a complaint at bit.ly/pp-rent3 .

To find out if your building is covered by New York’s rent stabilization laws as a result of a tax break, check bit.ly/pp-rent8. To find out if your building might be covered for any other reason, follow the directions at bit.ly/pp-rent1. Read more about rent stabilization at bit.ly/pp-rent9.

Sources: Tenants & Neighbors, Community Action for Safe Apartments, Urban Homesteading Assistance Board, The Legal Aid Society, Legal Services NYC, ProPublica research.