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Tenant Information Sheet: COCKROACHES

Cockroaches have been around for more than 400 million years. Because they contaminate food with their excrement and secrete an unpleasant odor which can permeate the indoor environment, these insects are considered by most homeowners (and entomologists) to be one of the worst household pests. Many of the environmental requirements of cockroaches (i.e., high humidity, warmth, and food sources) can be found in a typical home.

Here are some things you should know about cockroaches:

- * **Entry:** Cockroaches can enter your home in many different ways—from the outside through cracks and crevices, vents, sewer and drain pipes, even in grocery bags and other things you (or your kids) bring home.
- * **Ideal environment:** Your home's an ideal breeding ground. With plenty of food, warmth, water and nesting sites, they can remain active all year round.
- * **Reproduction:** Cockroaches reproduce quickly. For every one you see there can be 200 more hiding and multiplying behind your walls.
- * **Feeding:** Cockroaches evolved as scavengers of decaying plant materials, hence they will readily feed on carbohydrates, but they will also feed on a variety of other foods, including paints, wallpaper pastes, and book bindings.
- * **Evasiveness:** Because cockroaches are nocturnal, if you've seen one, you haven't seen them all. The few cockroaches you see by day were likely forced out by overcrowding, a possible sign of severe infestation.
- * **Your health:** The dust created by cast-off cockroach skins, dead bodies and droppings can aggravate allergies, especially in sensitive individuals. Cockroaches can literally make you sick by contaminating food and transmitting diseases such as gastroenteritis, food poisoning, and diarrhea.

Here are some things you can do to discourage cockroaches:

- * **Sanitation is the key.** Even the smallest crumbs of food attract cockroaches. So reduce sources of food and water. Even cough drops by the bed are potential cockroach food.
- * **Keep dead leaves and rubbish from accumulating near your home.**
- * **Store food in containers that close tightly and that cockroaches cannot chew through (paper and cardboard boxes are not roach-proof).**
- * **Put waste from the clean-up or preparation of meals in plastic containers with snap-on lids, and snap the lid on firmly after each use.**
- * **Wash bottles, cans, wrappings and other items that have food residues out thoroughly in soapy water before discarding or storing for recycling.**

- * Fix dripping faucets and any other leaks. Provide drainage or ventilation to dry out moist areas. Don't leave water on kitchen surfaces, and remove pet water bowls at night or place them in a pan of soapy water as a barrier to cockroaches.
- * Submerge dishes in a strong solution of detergent and water when you don't have time to wash them.

What can be done?

Killing roaches is easy. The problem is keeping them from returning. When an apartment is vacant and we're cleaning it, we'll frequently "bomb" the apartment for roaches (and other insects, like fleas, silverfish, flies, spiders, and mosquitoes). A bomb sprays an insecticide for four hours into a room. The room is then aired out, because the chemicals are unhealthful to people.

"Bombing" doesn't work very well with an apartment that's being lived in. That's because the chemical spray doesn't get into all those little places where roaches are living: in your television and VCR, behind furniture (as well as *inside* some furniture), in the fridge, and the like.

We have had some success with "ready to use" sprays, such as those made by Maxide and Ortho. We have sprayed around kitchen and bathroom areas, the insulation in the refrigerator, and the like.



What the law requires:

State law requires the landlord to provide "Buildings, grounds and appurtenances at the time of the commencement of the rental agreement in every part safe for normal and reasonably foreseeable uses, clean, sanitary and free from all accumulations of debris, filth, rubbish, garbage, rodents and vermin, and all areas under control of the landlord kept in every part safe for normal and reasonably foreseeable uses, clean, sanitary and free from all accumulations of debris, filth, rubbish, garbage, rodents and vermin." But the law also requires that a tenant "keep all areas of the premises under control of the tenant in every part as clean, sanitary and free from all accumulations of debris, filth, rubbish, garbage, rodents and vermin, as the condition of the premises permits and to the extent that the tenant is responsible for causing the problem."

What does that mean? It means that your landlord should give you the apartment free from roaches and mice. Also the landlord is responsible for keeping common areas free from roaches and mice. But you are supposed to keep your home free of such after you move in. Of course, it's not always easy to tell who's responsible: are the mice, for instance, breeding under the building and migrating into apartments? If the apartment was truly free from roaches when you moved in, and you have them now, it's likely you somehow brought them in.