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Q: One of our tenants died. He didn't have a will, or much of anything to put into one, since all he has is some ramshackle furniture, clothes, and some personal effects. I know I have to send a notice about stuff left behind, but how? And his three kids are all badgering me because they want his photo albums and stuff. How do I deal with them?

A: When a tenant living alone dies, you treat their possessions as abandoned property. That means mailing a notice (the major trade groups have a form) that says the tenant must make arrangements with you within the next eight days to retrieve the property; if not, you'll dispose of it by giving or throwing it away if it's of nominal value. The rules are different if it has substantial value.

Send the notice addressed to your tenant at the property address plus to any Post Office box you know of. I would also mail one addressed to "The Estate of" your tenant at your property address, and I'd mail copies in care of the children if you can get their addresses. You want them to get the notice.

But the only one who can act on behalf of a dead person is a personal representative arranged with you ahead of time or an executor or administrator of an estate. While your tenant may not have a will, setting up what's called a Small Estate is easy, quick, and cheap in Oregon. It means filing an affidavit with the Probate Court; it takes just a couple of days and costs about \$70. Armed with that, the kids can deal with you and possessions.

Of course, if no one gets in touch with you, you can give the stuff away, even to the kids. But if they're not in agreement, I'd threaten to throw it away; before I actually did that, though, I'd talk to my lawyer.