

MONMOUTH

Tenants union hopes that city talks will improve dwellings for renters

Mold is one issue that isn't addressed in the housing code.

BY JODY LAWRENCE-TURNER
Statesman Journal

A grass-roots group to inform Monmouth renters of their rights will work more closely with the City Council to get landlords to pay more attention to their tenants' needs for good housing.

The 2000 Census reports that 53.7 percent of the housing units in Monmouth are renter-occupied. The number is about 20 percent higher than the state average.

The report on neighboring Independence shows that 35.6 percent of the residents are renters.

Many of the renters in Monmouth are students at Western Oregon University, and they are being taken advantage of, said Anna Mouldin, one of 14 active members of the Monmouth-Independence Tenants Union.

The group was formed in 1998 with the intent of notifying all renters of their rights because a group of students at the university felt that managers and landlords were taking advantage of them.

Examples include nonworking fire extinguishers, mold, broken railings and steps, broken appliances and dangerous wall heaters.

The union's main purpose is to clarify the law regarding housing codes for renters by working with city officials to implement the law and by addressing the limits of the current law.

The latter issue is particularly important, Mouldin said, because the current housing code doesn't include the elimination of mold.

"A lot of the complexes don't have good seals or proper ventilation," she said, "and the peo-



RENTERS' RIGHTS:

The Monmouth-Independence Tenants Union, a grass-roots group, is working with the Monmouth City Council to develop short-term goals to let residents know their rights as renters. These college apartments for rent can be found on College Street S in Monmouth.

KOBBY R. BLAIR
Statesman Journal

Work session

The Monmouth City Council has invited the Monmouth-Independence Tenants Union to a council work session to discuss the adoption of some of the union's goals.

The session will be 7:30 p.m. April 17 in the Volunteer Hall, 144 S Warren St. in Monmouth.

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ple who live there are told that it's their responsibility to deal with it."

Some renters say that mold has extended up to 4 feet up the sides of walls and that the owners tell them simply to get rid of it by opening the windows for ventilation.

Renter Loren FiField is one who told the tenants union about the poor condition of his apartment.

He said the shower curtain rod pushed through the wall in

his bathroom because of moisture and mold problems. It took two months for the apartment manager to fix it.

"And, there's been mold on my window panes since I've been here," he said.

The union has three short-term goals:

- Establish a formal "problem checklist" to be available to all tenants.

- Establish a formal written procedure for reporting violations to the city of Monmouth.

- Recognize the growth of persistent mold as a health hazard and include it as a violation in the Monmouth housing code.

Mouldin said one hope is that Monmouth Mayor Larry Dalton will be able to help because he works at Windemere Western Management, which manages about 400 rental properties in the area, most of them in Monmouth.

Larry Thornton, Monmouth's

building inspector, said the actions of the tenants union have helped him. The complaints are more specifically related to housing codes as opposed to people complaining about issues the city cannot address.

Thornton said he and members of the union put together a checklist based on city and state housing codes.

People can take the checklist forms to city hall, Thornton said, and then he will know that the violations can be dealt with.

Although the tenants union does not track the impact of its actions, Thornton said, once the city is involved, managers or landlords usually take care of the problems.

Monmouth had 47 housing-code complaints in 2002.

Independence has had one in the past two years, said Jeff Kennedy, Independence's building official.