



4 pieces of advice for renters

By Lily Leung

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Here's a rental market update with advice for tenants from Alan Pentico, executive director of the San Diego County Apartment Association. U-T San Diego's weekly rental column is taking a break this week.

The Great Recession has forced many people, including families with young children, out of their homes and into apartments. Vacancy rates in the San Diego region continue to hover around 4 percent.

The San Diego County Apartment Association's fall 2011 vacancy and rental rate survey showed that the share of unoccupied rentals countywide was 4.3 percent, up from 3.9 percent in the spring, but down from 4.6 percent in fall 2010.

The variables driving the rental boom, from the sluggish economy and uncertainty in the housing market, are not expected to change anytime soon. We're ramping up education efforts for owners and managers, especially first-time landlords, because we expect this to be a busy year.

Even in less competitive rental markets, the rental process can be daunting for some. Few renters know all of their rights and new renters feel especially vulnerable when faced with issues that invariably surface, including questions about pets, privacy rights and security deposits.

People always ask me, "What's the best piece of advice you can give renters?" I always respond with the same answer: "Read your rental agreement."

Just about everything you need to know is in the agreement, which should be provided to you before signing your lease. I can't stress enough the importance of reading the rental agreement, in its entirety, before signing on the dotted line. If there is something you don't agree with ask to have it changed.

Our members walk perspective residents through the rental agreement to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Here are three more important pieces of advice for renters:

- Take pictures of your apartment before moving in. This helps resolve deposit disputes when it's time to move out.
- We encourage all renters, especially young ones, to choose their roommates wisely. The friend who still owes you \$20 for the movie and burger you bought him six weeks ago might present similar challenges when it's time to pay the rent or a utility bill.
- Communicate repair requests in writing. It's a good way to keep track of the request and it can eliminate any misunderstandings that may be forgotten in a verbal conversation.

For more information on your rights and responsibilities when renting, as well as tips for moving in and out of a rental unit, **please visit the SDCAA's web page for renters.**

Traditionally, market rate rentals have been the most affordable housing option outside of government subsidized housing. The SDCAA web site includes a link to apartments for rent throughout the county.

The San Diego County Apartment Association serves 150,000 rental housing units and 2,200 members in San Diego County.

How to reach reporter Lily Leung -- **Email me: lily.leung@utsandiego.com | Tweet me: [@LilyShumLeung](https://twitter.com/LilyShumLeung) | Subscribe to this blog. | Or try Google+.**

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