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APARTMENTS

Storm woes can make it tough for many to pay the rent on time

By Katherine Feser



Marie D. De Jesús / Houston Chronicle

Kenia Sanchez drags a box with belongings on her way upstairs to an apartment not damaged by Hurricane Harvey. Sanchez's apartment was flooded as well as her family's two cars.

The calendar clicked over to a new month Friday, with rents and mortgages due again despite widespread flooding and displacement due to Hurricane Harvey's rampage along the Texas coast.

Some local landlords say they are willing to work with tenants who may have been forced into shelters or neighbors' spare rooms as well as those suddenly missing work and paychecks.

On Saturday, officials and clergy from The Metropolitan Organization plan to publicly call on Houston-area landlords to give renters a grace period of at least three weeks.

"TMO is convening this group because pastors and families are afraid of evictions for not being able to pay rent, due to a week without work caused by Hurricane Harvey," the community organizing group said in a statement. "This loss of income is devastating to families, and evictions will exacerbate financial hardships and instability during this recovery period."

Allied Orion Group, which operates 68 apartment properties with 12,000 units locally, will waive late fees this month and possibly longer, chief operating officer Ian Douglas said. Allied also is forgoing the application and administrative fees for residents being relocated due to damages.

Some are likely to be moved to new housing for months while their units are repaired, Douglas said.

“As far as late fees and all that goes, we’re working with residents as much as we can to make sure they’re taken care of,” Douglas said.

“We froze all rents as of the rate that they were on the Friday before the storm hit,” he added.

Houston-based Camden’s 8,500 apartment units in 24 properties were largely spared in this week’s flooding. The company is offering a break not just to residents of the 70 flooded units and others damaged by leaks.

“Since rents were due on Sept. 1, we have waived late fees for anybody in our system in September,” CEO Ric Campo said.

“If you can’t pay your rent on time for any reason, there are no late fees.”

Complaint by resident

Not all leasing companies made the same offer. A representative of the Linda Vista apartment complex in northwest Houston, for example, confirmed that it would not waive late fees after a resident complained about it to the Chronicle. James Eaton said the flood conditions is delaying his employer from paying his salary. He said he explained the situation to the property managers but to no avail.

The local representative, who asked not to be identified, read from a statement and said she would forward a request for further comment to the corporate offices of BNC Equities in Dallas. The company did not follow up.

At Camden, which is in the process of moving affected residents to other units, contractors are expected to complete restoration of the flooded apartments within 45 days, Campo said.

The company is also finding lodging for more than 40 of its 450 employees whose homes were flooded.

The Finger Cos. sustained damage at 20 apartment properties, including some that were severely damaged and are still without power, president and CEO Marvey Finger said.

The three-story Park on Memorial town-home property with 360 units near Buffalo Bayou was “wiped out” when water from the Addicks reservoir was released to avoid catastrophe upstream.

The company is working with residents on a case-by-case basis.

“We’re very sympathetic,” Finger said. “We are making substantial donations, and we’re taking care of our residents.”

“I have a few projects believe it or not that were not touched,” Finger said. “That’s the rare exception.”

Help with paperwork

Swapnil Agarwal, head of Nitya Capital, which owns more than 9,000 mostly older apartment units managed by Karya Property Management, said in a statement that it would not charge late fees before Sept. 11.

“Our staff is also working with all residents in helping them with FEMA assistance paperwork,” the statement said. “We are also trying to work out a payment plan for tenants that have lost jobs or are not getting their paychecks on time.”

Steve Moore, head of Villa Serena Communities, estimated that 20 percent of the company’s 5,000 apartment units in Greenspoint area north of Houston were damaged. He’s waiving late fees for one week.

“We’re expecting everybody to pay their rent,” Moore said. “If their unit is not habitable, we’ll find them one that is.”

Federal assistance

Moore, a resident of Greenspoint, said his top priority is to get air conditioners working and properties repaired.

He noted the Federal Emergency Management Agency has sent representatives to provide financial assistance to renters who need it.

For homeowners, Chase, Bank of America, BBVA Compass, Wells Fargo and Amegy are among the banks offering to waive or refund late fees for mortgage payments.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. is encouraging banks to work with customers seriously affected by Hurricane Harvey, in some cases asking them to allow customers to skip loan payments, extend loan terms and restructure loans. katherine.feser@chron.com twitter.com/kfeser

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