

Rental Accommodations

Whether you are someone transitioning into Student Accommodation or new to rental style living, you have rights to safe accommodations.

Smoke Alarms

It is the law in Ontario to have working smoke alarms on every storey and outside all sleeping areas. The law applies to single family, semi-detached, town homes and apartments (including basement apartments), whether owner-occupied or rented. Rooming houses have specific regulations about smoke alarms or fire alarm systems. In addition to smoke alarms within each unit or suite, apartment buildings and student residences operated by the school may also have a building fire alarm system. Make sure the landlord, administrator/superintendent identifies and explains the fire alarm and detection features in the building and unit.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Ontario law requires all homes/apartments to have a working carbon monoxide alarm outside all sleeping areas if there is a fuel-burning appliance or fireplace in the home/apartment. If the building has a service room or a garage, carbon monoxide alarms must be installed outside each sleeping area of all apartment units above, below and beside the service room or garage. If there is a service room, a carbon monoxide alarm also must be installed in the service room. Contact the local fire department for more information.

Fire Separations

Students often find accommodation in older homes converted to apartments or rooming houses. At the time of the conversion, a building permit should have been obtained to ensure that fire safety features such as proper exits and fire separations between units are provided. Ask the owner if the property complies with the Building Code and Fire Code and to explain the fire safety features.

Exits

It is important to consider how people will escape from a room or apartment in an emergency. Every room or apartment requires adequate exits that will permit unobstructed escape from the building. Make sure to ask the landlord or superintendent to identify all of the designated exits. All windows and doors should open fully and easily. Stairways and hallways must not be used for storage as this can pose serious fire safety hazards. Furniture and other obstacles can physically block exits and may fill hallways or stairways with smoke if they catch fire. This practice must be strictly avoided.

Security

Some property owners install bars on windows for security measures. While this may seem appealing from a security standpoint, it may prevent you from escaping in an emergency situation. Security bars on windows should be equipped with a quick-opening device on the inside so they can be removed quickly.

Fire Escape Plans

In a fire emergency, everyone must know what to do and where to go. Large apartment buildings and student residence buildings require a fire safety plan, which informs the occupants about emergency procedures. Ask the building administrator or superintendent to explain the procedures in the fire safety plan.

Smaller apartment buildings and houses that have been converted to apartments or lodging rooms may not have a fire safety plan, however it is a good idea to ensure there are two ways out of the unit. The alternate way out can be a window that can be safely exited in an emergency.

Electrical Safety

Many buildings offering lodging to students are older homes that may not have upgraded wiring. Outlets in bathrooms or within one metre of the kitchen sink should be the Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) type. Consider the number and location of electrical outlets in the room or apartment. There should be enough outlets so that appliances such as lamps, computer equipment and stereos can be operated without the use of extension cords. If extension cords can't be avoided, use multi-outlet power bars that are approved and provide surge protection and a circuit breaker. Make sure that electrical cords of any kind are not concealed under carpets or rugs where they can be easily damaged. Avoid overloaded circuits and octopus wiring.