Behind the Scenes at Housing Direct

From leaking taps to faulty locks, Housing Direct staff are on hand to assist tenants with their maintenance issues.

The Perth-based team consists of about 65 employees, working across two offices in the metropolitan area, which Customer Service Manager Housing Direct Dylan Spencer says is a great advantage.

“We know the places you are talking about, we have local knowledge,” he said.

Mr Spencer said Mondays were typically the busiest day of the week in the office with about 750 maintenance calls received compared to around 550 calls during business hours on an average weekday.

“Outside of business hours, which are 8am to 5pm, we have an After Hours Service, which deals with emergency maintenance queries – things that pose an immediate risk to the health and safety of the tenant such as a gas leak, live wires or malfunctioning RCDs and smoke alarms,” he said.

Mr Spencer said the most important thing for tenants to understand when they call Housing Direct was to expect a lot of questions to help diagnose the problem at hand.

“For example if it is a broken window, we’ll ask you about the size of the window,” he said.

Mr Spencer said the next step was for a work order to be issued, which is then sent to one of Housing’s four head contractors to carry out.

“We get a lot of good feedback; a lot of tenants call back to say thanks. It is always good to hear the positive result after a call,” he said.

Housing Direct staff have taken out a number of National and State awards, including every category entered at last year’s Auscontact Awards as well as winning the National 2014 Auscontact Centre of the Year award in the 31-80 Full Time Employees category.

“We are quite proud of our performance in a competitive field and it is something we hope to continue,” Mr Spencer said.

Fast facts

- Contact Housing Direct or the After Hours Service on 1300 137 677 or lodge a non-urgent maintenance request online at housing.wa.gov.au
- On Thursdays from 12.30pm to 2.00pm, calls are diverted to the After Hours Service to allow Housing Direct staff to take part in training and development to offer improved customer service to tenants
- Tenants who have maintenance issues are encouraged to call and make a report rather than waiting for the situation to become worse
- Last year Housing Direct answered 210,000 calls.
Understanding the risks

Bushfires can start suddenly and without time for warnings to be issued. A well-prepared home will give you more protection if a fire threatens and you cannot leave.

You need to think about the bushfire risk to your family and home if:

- You live in or near bush
- Your local area has a bushfire history
- You have trees and shrubs within 20 metres of your house
- Your house is built on a slope.

You need to be prepared

Preparing your home and family for the bushfire season is important. To reduce the risks and protect your home and your family, manage your property all year round.

Hazard reduction actions you can do on your property include:

- Ensuring your driveway is clear
- Clearing long grass, raking leaves and twigs and pruning garden shrubs and low level tree branches
- Spraying grass and weeds with herbicide
- Removing flammable material from around your house such as wood piles
- Ensuring trees are lopped back, away from buildings. Call Housing Direct for assistance on 1300 137 677.

Have a plan

You need to put your preparation into action but you also need to think about:

- How you will get to a safer place, particularly if you have children or elderly relatives
- Letting people know where you are going.

Other things you and your family can do throughout the year are:

- Discuss fire prevention with friends and family
- Have a survival plan and share it with friends and neighbours
- Prepare an emergency kit, including your survival plan
- Keep yourself informed.

To seek information in the event of a major bushfire:

- Listen to local radio
- Visit www.dfes.wa.gov.au
- Call the Department of Fire and Emergency Services information line on 13 DFES (13 3337).

Dog owners reminded to chip in

Tenants are reminded that if their dog is over three months old, they must be microchipped. This requirement was brought in last November as part of the Dog Act 1976, with owners facing a $5000 fine if they break the law.

The procedure is carried out by vets, animal welfare organisations and occasionally local councils and will last for a dog’s entire life. Once the microchip is inserted, the dog’s details as well as the owner’s address and phone number are entered on a national database.

To check what is currently recorded for your dog, visit petaddress.com.au.

Dog owners are also asked to help Housing Authority staff who are inspecting their properties by making sure their animals are confined or restrained on the outside of the property during the inspection.
Rent calculation changes

What has changed?
The Housing Authority has changed the way that public housing rent is calculated. From Monday 28 March 2016 some previously non-assessable and partially assessable household income will now be fully assessed when calculating rent.

Rent will be charged at 25 per cent of the total assessable household income. Assessable income is defined as any payment received by a household member that is regular, ongoing and provided to meet the general costs of living.

Why has it changed?
The previous rent calculation method meant that some tenants paid a higher percentage of their income as rent than others because of a range of different payment types that were excluded or assessed at lower percentage rates when calculating rent.

Even with the changes, eligible tenants will continue to either pay 25 per cent of their household income as rent or the market rent for the property, whichever is the lower amount.

How does the change affect me?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your situation</th>
<th>How the change will occur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I became a tenant before 28 September 2015.</td>
<td>On 18 January 2016 you were sent a letter outlining the new rent charge giving you 60 days’ notice of the rent calculation changes commencing from 28 March 2016. Rent increases have been limited to a maximum of $12 per week for the 2015/16 financial year.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I became a tenant between 28 September 2015 and 27 March 2016.</td>
<td>You will not move to the new rent calculation method until you have been in occupation for at least six months (in accordance with the Residential Tenancies Act 1987). You will be advised in writing at least 60 days’ prior to any rent calculation method changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a new tenant who signed a Tenancy Agreement on or after 28 March 2016 (including if you transfer to another Housing Authority property).</td>
<td>Your rent will be calculated at 25 per cent of assessable income or the market rent for the property, whichever is the lower amount, from the commencement of your new tenancy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Separate to the new calculation method, rent increases of more than $12 per week may have occurred if the household income increased or another person moved into the property since the last rent assessment.

How some income payments will now be treated to calculate rent

Newly assessable:
- Carer Allowance
- Energy Supplement
- Large Family Supplement
- Pharmaceutical Allowance.

Now assessed at 25 per cent:
- Child Maintenance
- Family Tax Benefit Part A and B
- Youth Allowance.

Remains non-assessable:
- Department of Veterans’ Affairs Disability Pensions
- Bereavement Payment
- Mobility Allowance.

If you have any questions about the rent calculation changes contact your Housing Services Officer. Alternatively you may wish to view information on the Housing Authority website housing.wa.gov.au. Financial counselling is available. If you require some assistance, please contact your local Housing Authority office.
RCD AND SMOKE ALARM FACT SHEET

The Housing Authority has installed a number of safety devices in your home.

A Residual Current Device (RCD) provides protection against electric shock. If the RCD detects an imbalance in the electrical current indicating a leakage to earth (for example, current flows through someone’s body to earth) the RCD immediately cuts the electricity supply to prevent electrocution.

You will have more than one RCD. They are located in the meter box and can be identified by the presence of a TEST button. You should test them every three months.

A smoke alarm alerts you to the presence of smoke and the potential of fire in the property. Your smoke alarm should be tested every month.

How to test your smoke alarm

• To test the smoke alarm, turn your power off at the mains
• Press the TEST button (as illustrated). The alarm should beep loudly
• If you are unable to reach the test button, please use a broom handle
• The smoke alarm will automatically reset once the button has been released after testing
• Once the test is complete, remember to turn your power back on at the mains.

If you don’t hear a sound when testing or you notice any other problem with your smoke alarm you need to call Housing Direct on 1300 137 677.

How to test your RCD

• Press the TEST button on the RCD. You should hear a click
• The lever will flip downwards to the ‘off’ position. This means that the device is working and the power has been turned off
• Flip the lever upwards to ‘on’. You may need to push firmly. This will turn the power back on.

If the lever doesn’t flip downwards or you notice any other problem with your RCD you need to contact Housing Direct on 1300 137 677.

A rechargeable battery backup that cannot be changed is built into your smoke alarm. This battery does not need replacing. Ensure the smoke alarm is kept clean and that excess dust does not build up – vacuum if necessary.

• DO NOT use a screw driver
• DO NOT put tape or paint or any other cover over the alarm
• DO NOT remove the alarm for any reason.