



RENTER DAMAGE POLICY

The co-operative's policy relating to renter charges are detailed in this policy

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Purpose

This policy establishes the approach of SouthEast to clearly define the renter’s responsibilities and SouthEast responsibilities in maintenance.

SouthEast may charge renters for the cost of repairing renter-caused damage to a premises or undertaking services that the renter is responsible for. Tenant caused damage includes damages caused by children, partners, pets or any visitors invited into the property by the renter.

Scope

This policy applies to all renters managed by SouthEast under all relevant programs.

Approach to repair charges

- Part 2 of the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) outlines the rights and duties of the renter and the residential rental providers (general duties of renters and residential rental providers) which forms the basis of the Tenant Damage Policy. Under s61, renters or visitors must not intentionally or negligently cause damage (replacing the duty for a renter to ensure care is taken to avoid damaging the rented premises).
- Safety related duties on renter including a duty not to remove, deactivate or otherwise interfere with the operation of a prescribed safety device at a rented premises unless it is reasonable in the circumstances to do so.
- Renters must give written notice to the residential rental provider as soon as practicable after becoming aware of damage to the rented premises or breakdown of facilities, fixtures, furniture or equipment provided by the residential rental provider. A renter who becomes aware of any damage, whether the damage is caused by the renter or not, to the rented premises must inform SouthEast as soon as possible.
- SouthEast will perform repairs to ensure that the premises are maintained in good repair.
- A renter must avoid damage to premises or common areas:
 - (a) A renter must ensure that care is taken to avoid damaging the rented premises.
 - (b) A renter must take reasonable care to avoid damaging the common areas.
- SouthEast will seek to recover repair charges from renters in circumstances where repairs to the premises are necessary, as a result of deliberate damage or neglect caused by the renter, another household member or a visitor who enters the property with the renter's permission.
- SouthEast will not seek to recover repair charges for fair wear and tear that occurs to the premises through ordinary day-to-day use of the property by a renter.
- SouthEast may not seek to recover repair charges for damage caused by mental and physical health, instances of family violence, or third party criminal damage.
- SouthEast may not seek to recover repair charges for any item, fixture or fitting at the end of its useable life or that is due to be replaced.
- The policy may not apply to circumstances where renters, residents or visitors have caused intentional, extensive and malicious damage to the property. In these circumstances, SouthEast may serve an immediate notice to vacate and seek an Order for Possession under s243 of the RTA.

Repair charges

Repair charges for damage and repairs will be sought from renters in the following circumstances:

Intentional damage to the property:

- alterations being made without approval
- alterations carried out by or on behalf of the renter not conforming to SouthEast requirements
- fixtures or fittings installed do not meet the required standards of SouthEast
- floor coverings being removed without the consent of SouthEast
- malicious damage to the premises
- punctured internal cabinets, doors and walls
- sewer and/or drainage blockages caused by items flushed down the toilet, such as sanitary products, wipes, nappies or toys

Neglectful damage:

- broken and damaged clotheslines and hoists
- broken windows
- burns or other damage to carpets that cannot be considered fair wear and tear
- damage caused by neglect
- damage to toilets, basins, showers, and bathtubs
- damaged/missing doors and security screens
- erroneous call outs
- failure to keep the property in a reasonably clean condition
- failure to take care to prevent damage to the property
- pest control

Compliance with third party instructions:

- instances where emergency services are required to gain access to the premises, the renter may be invoiced for the cost of any associated damage
- a direction from Victoria Police
- a direction from council by-laws [e.g. hoarding]
- a direction from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade or the Country Fire Authority

- the premises being damaged or destroyed by fire as a result of the actions of the renter, as confirmed by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade or the Country Fire Authority
- a compensation or compliance order from Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)

Conclusion of the residential rental agreement:

- approved alterations being made during the residential rental agreement and the premises not being restored to the condition existing at the start of the residential rental agreement or as at completion of the most recent works undertaken by SouthEast (fair wear and tear excepted)
- broken locks or where keys have not been returned to SouthEast at the end of a residential rental agreement
- end of residential rental agreement cleaning
- any costs associated with the removal of renter property such as furniture, appliances, personal effects or vehicles left behind at the end of the residential rental agreement

Prior to taking any action in relation to damage to the premises / residential rental agreement breaches, SouthEast will investigate and confirm the renter's responsibility for the damage, including discussing the matter with the renter. SouthEast will undertake a human rights impact assessment before determining whether to issue a residential rental agreement breach relevant to the level of damage at the property.

Tenant responsibilities

Tenants will:

- Abide by the terms and conditions of their Residential rental agreement
- Take good care of the property and keep it reasonably clean
- Tell SouthEast as soon as possible if the property has been damaged
- Pay costs for damage that results from deliberate action, mistreatment or negligence of a renter, household member or visitor has been proven and to comply with orders to pay the cost of repairs or cleaning
- Report to the Police any damage that is suspected to have resulted from criminal activity, such as break and enter, vandalism or family violence (if possible); and provide SouthEast with an event number

- Rectify any alterations carried out by the renter before handing the keys back
- Restore the property to the condition it was in at the start of the residential rental agreement, after allowing for fair wear and tear
- Return all keys to SouthEast at the conclusion of a residential rental agreement

Landlord responsibilities

SouthEast commits to fulfil its role as residential rental providers under the RTA.

SouthEast will:

- Ensure the premises is in reasonably clean condition prior to a residential rental agreement commencing, is maintained to a community standard, and never below a habitable standard
- Provides renters with a written statement setting out the rights and duties of SouthEast and the renter under a residential rental agreement
- Inspect the premises every 12 months
- Undertake responsive and cyclical maintenance, and has a flexible program of upgrades that can take advantage of vacancies
- Ensure all maintenance is undertaken by qualified tradespeople

Managing renter repair charges

If SouthEast considers that the renter has breached their responsibilities as outlined in the residential rental agreement or in this or any other applicable policy, SouthEast may seek repair charges for the costs to repair damage.

SouthEast will undertake the following steps to seek to recover repair charges:

- Inspect the premises and complete a property condition report ideally with the renter present
- Collect evidence of the damage sustained at the premises, and evidence of how the damage may have occurred, including photos
- Detail in a transparent and comprehensive manner to the renter the repair charges to recover the costs of the repairs and maintenance

- Provide the renter a written notice of the proposed renter repair and maintenance charges, the notice will outline the proposed terms of the repair charges, and will also provide the renter with the option to negotiate on these terms
- In the interests of transparency and accountability, SouthEast will provide information relating to how the cost of repairs were determined

Determining responsibility for damage to the premises

To determine who is responsible for the cost of repairing damage to the premises SouthEast will ensure the process is fair, timely and evidence based by:

- Inspecting the premises and documenting the damage where appropriate
- Taking into account the condition of the premises at the beginning of the residential rental agreement, as stated in the Property Condition Report and any evidence of work undertaken on the property
- Taking into account damage due to fair wear and tear, which SouthEast are responsible to repair
- Taking into account damage due to an emergency situation where there was good cause to believe that the renter's health and wellbeing was at risk
- Considering whether ill health or inability to maintain the premises has contributed to the damage. In these circumstances the renter is required to provide evidence
- Considering whether the damage is a result of criminal activity such as family violence, break and enter or vandalism. In these cases, a Police report should be supplied by the renter where possible
- Discussing the items of damage with the renter and recording information the renter or a third party gives SouthEast about the possible cause of the damage
- Taking into account the type of damage and any information concerning liability the renter gives to SouthEast when reporting the damage

In circumstances of criminal activity, the renter is requested to provide evidence within (14) days, proving the renter has reported the matter to the Police, such as a Police statement or Police Event Number.

Where SouthEast determines that the damage is a result of intentional damage, mistreatment or neglect, the renter will be responsible for the cost of repair work.

SouthEast will seek to recover the cost of repairing the damage from the renter or in certain circumstances, for example where the damage is a result of criminal activity.

Appealing decisions about renter repair costs

If a current or vacated renter disputes the amount of the renter repair charges or denies responsibility for the damage, SouthEast advises them of their right and the process to lodge an appeal for a review of the decision.

SouthEast will advise the renter that they can apply to VCAT to have the condition of the premises and any damage determined by the tribunal (where applicable) as per the RTA.

Repayment Agreement

After responsibility has been resolved, SouthEast and the renter will both sign a repayment agreement detailing the costs involved and how it will be paid (lump sum or series of instalments).

Tenants may choose to have third party support in resolving and negotiating the matter. During the negotiation, staff will take into account fair wear and tear. Fixtures and fittings at the end of their useable life or programmed for replacement will not be subject to renter repair charges.

If the renter accepts liability for the identified damage, the claim should be considered a substantiated renter repair charge. The renter may either pay the amount in full or enter into a repayment agreement. The total repayment amount cannot exceed 25% of the household's total income unless approved by the Residential rental agreement Officer and agreed by the renter.

If the renter has vacated the property, the renter repair charge will be held against the renter as per the relevant VCAT order.

Breach and Compliance Process

If an agreement cannot be reached, or an agreement is broken, SouthEast will pursue the costs through the breach and compliance process under the RTA.

This may include:

- issuing a breach of duty notice under s. 208: *Breach of Duty Notice* for:
 - s. 61: *Tenant must avoid damage to premises or common areas*
 - s. 63: *Tenant must keep rented premises clean*
 - s. 64: *Tenant must not install fixtures, etc. without consent*

Communication

SouthEast will provide clear information to renters on this policy and will inform renters when the policy is being used to recover costs.

Related policies

VHR

- Allocations
- Allocations Eligibility
- Rent Setting
- Privacy
- Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedures
- Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy

SouthEast

- Privacy and Data Protection
- Complaints

Legislation and standards

This policy implements SouthEast Housing Cooperative obligations where they exist under:

- Privacy Act 1988 (C'wlth)
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)
- Housing Act 1983 (Vic) Part VIIIA – Social Housing
- Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)
- Performance Standards for Registered Housing Agencies
- DHHS Victorian Housing Register Operational Guidelines
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) (effective 2020 for CHOs)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) (effective 2020 for CHOs)
- Residential Tenancies Act 1997

Transparency and accessibility

This policy will be available on SouthEast website www.sehc.org.au

Acknowledgement

SouthEast acknowledges the policy work undertaken by CHIA Vic and Bridge **Housing Limited**, the **Department of Health and Human Services** and **Aboriginal Housing Victoria** in developing this policy template.

Policy updated to align with changes introduced into the Residential Tenancy Act 1997 effective 29 March 2021 with changes to content sourced from: *Residential Tenancy Law Changes: Overview of Key Changes to Residential Tenancy Legislation and Regulations in 2021. Community Housing Industry Association, Victoria.*

| Review and approval of this policy | | | | |
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