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March 9, 2023

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HUD OIG Announces Environmental Justice Initiative

WASHINGTON DC— The HUD Inspector General has launched an initiative to advance environmental justice in HUD-assisted housing (“HUD Housing”).

Inspector General Rae Oliver Davis stated: “My office is prioritizing oversight work that promotes safe, affordable housing by reducing environmental and public health hazards in HUD housing. Our commitment to this work will support the comprehensive environmental justice strategies outlined by HUD and the Department of Justice aimed at reversing environmental inequities in underserved low-income communities that rely heavily on HUD’s housing assistance programs.”

“We are committed to holding housing providers accountable for complying with environmental laws and regulations to protect the health of low-income households and vulnerable populations and we will use every tool available to combat environmental crime and injustice in housing.”

HUD OIG is prioritizing the following oversight objectives to advance environmental justice in HUD housing:

- **Ensuring public housing agencies (PHAs), landlords, contractors, and inspectors properly identify lead hazards and use safe work practices to reduce and prevent lead exposure and poisoning in HUD housing.**

Unfortunately, there are still many communities in America where housing contains lead-based paint, and lead hazards disproportionately harm low-income communities. Public housing agencies are critical partners for HUD in administering housing assistance at the local level and ensuring that HUD housing is safe and hazard-free. Our office has identified eliminating safety hazards in HUD housing as a [Top Management Challenge for HUD](#). We also identified several [Priority Open Recommendations](#) related to enhancing HUD’s oversight of lead safety laws as priority for HUD to address.

We reported recently that [HUD is challenged in overseeing PHAs efforts to reduce lead-based paint hazards in public housing units](#), and that HUD largely relies on PHAs to self-certify they are in compliance with HUD’s Lead Safe Housing Rule. We also found that [opportunities exist to improve HUD’s processes for monitoring children with elevated blood lead levels in public housing](#).

To assess how lead-based paint is being handled at the community level, we launched a series of audits examining how large PHAs in [Pennsylvania](#), [Ohio](#), and [California](#) manage lead-based paint hazards in their public housing stock. We selected these PHAs because they serve communities where we found that a substantial number of buildings that house HUD-assisted families with children may contain lead-based paint.

HUD OIG has launched several investigations into allegations that maintenance work on properties containing lead-based paint was not done safely, causing tenants to be exposed to dangerous lead hazards. Our recent investigations have resulted in significant criminal and civil penalties— [Contractor Sentenced to over 1 Year for Violating Federal Lead Paint Laws](#) and [Contractor Sentenced and Fined \\$50,000 for False Lead Inspection Certificates](#).

We will continue pursuing allegations like these aggressively and in coordination with our law enforcement partners.

- **Ensuring landlords fulfill their obligations to provide housing units that are decent, safe, and sanitary, and make necessary repairs to units in a timely and safe manner.**

Most of HUD's housing stock is old and in need of capital improvements, especially public housing buildings. As HUD works with PHAs on strategies to preserve affordable housing and address rehabilitation and physical needs of properties, our office is focused on ensuring that HUD tenants have quality housing to live in.

We are currently assessing HUD's oversight of the [physical conditions of public housing units](#) with a focus on how HUD oversees the corrective actions PHAs take in response to physical inspections of properties. At the community level, we are launching audits of HUD-assisted housing unit conditions at PHAs in [Massachusetts](#) and [Ohio](#), where we have identified large populations of low-income, vulnerable populations that may be exposed to hazards and life-threatening health and safety conditions in HUD-assisted housing units.

HUD OIG has also dedicated resources to investigating allegations that landlords receiving HUD assistance are not fulfilling their responsibilities to ensure their properties are safe for tenants to live in, and to address critical repair needs. We have assisted HUD in bringing enforcement actions that resulted in significant penalties for landlords who breach their duty to provide decent, safe, and sanitary conditions in HUD housing – [HUD Awarded a \\$1.2 Million Civil Money Penalty Against Apex Waukegan LLC and Integra](#).

- **Fighting financial fraud schemes that exploit vulnerable populations relying on HUD housing assistance, such as landlords who overcharge rent or housing fees.**

Unfortunately, some landlords participating in HUD's rental assistance programs have targeted vulnerable populations receiving assistance with financial fraud schemes that charge more in rent or other fees for housing services than they are allowed. These schemes may be present when landlords charge HUD-assisted tenants more than other tenants— [Newark Landlords Agree to Pay \\$430,000 to Settle Allegations of Collecting Excess Rent in Sparrow Run](#) – or when landlords demand tenants pay

rent or utilities fees beyond what was agreed to in their lease or be evicted – [Holyoke Landlord Agrees to \\$15,000 Settlement for False Claims Act Violations](#).

These schemes take valuable dollars out of the pockets of low-income households by preying on their housing insecurity. This fraud also reduces the number of families that HUD’s important program can serve. Our office will continue to pursue these matters with the Department of Justice to bring justice to those victimized by these schemes and to promote safe, affordable housing to support a thriving community.

We encourage anyone with information about environmental hazards and unsafe unit conditions in HUD housing or bad actors who victimize HUD tenants through financial fraud schemes to contact the HUD OIG Hotline at 1-800-347-3735 or reporting online at <https://www.hudoig.gov/hotline>.

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