
LAS VEGAS SUN

renting:

Small landlords face big risks

As complexes screen for felons, individual owners also advised to



Chris Morris

By [Abigail Goldman](#)

Sat, Aug 30, 2008 (2 a.m.)

Pity the poor landlords. No, not those who manage massive apartment complexes, but the little guys, the residential landlords, the grandmas and single moms and second-home owners who rent out a room or an investment property on the side. The small operators are the biggest suckers when it comes to criminal renters.

This is bad news that, like all things these days, leads back to a bad economy. It's a compounded problem, too. Part 1: People who can't sell their houses are renting them instead. Part 2: People who have been booted from foreclosed properties are looking to rent. Part 3: Managers of the valley's apartment complexes, in an effort to

make them safer and less susceptible to criminal renters, have started doing criminal background checks on applicants, turning away convicted felons, who then show up at small landlords' doors.

The result is more landlords renting individual properties, only to find them used for drug sales, prostitution and other crimes, Metro Police say. Homeowners don't put potential renters through anywhere near the same screening that large apartment complex owners do, and as a result, end up with bad-news tenants.

In an effort to help these little landlords, Metro held a seminar Wednesday night, advising 40 or so people on how to protect themselves from undesirable renters. The basic message: Set really high standards that every applicant must meet.

It sounds simple, but it's kind of sticky — landlords can attempt to weed out undesirables, but they can't discriminate. And so a lot of the class was devoted to recognizing the kind of behaviors that set landlords up for lawsuits. Luckily, depending on whom you ask, criminals are not a protected class, so felons can be refused at the door.

This is what managers of some of Las Vegas' most crime-ridden properties have been doing for the past year, as part of a renewed police effort to boost the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program, which mandates that member landlords run criminal background checks on prospective tenants.

At the Rancho Alvarado Apartments on Maryland Parkway near Tropicana Avenue, identified last year by Metro as one of the most troubled properties in the southeast Las Vegas Valley, management started screening applicants for criminal history in October.

Since then, calls for police have dramatically decreased at the complex. The complex also has fewer vacancies.

And it's not even the screening that deflects bad applicants, Rancho Alvarado manager Elsie Lopez says. It's the threat of being screened. Because prospective renters are told upfront the complex will pay a service to comb their records, most troublemakers just don't come back. They know well enough what the search will turn up, and so they look elsewhere.

Now the backfire: That elsewhere is often an amateur landlord's property. At the Wednesday seminar, Metro crime prevention specialist Ed Daley asked the audience how many people currently run prospective renters' records, and only a few hands went up.

It's a personal issue for Daley — a town house across the street from his own was rented to drug dealers who were doing open-air sales in the streets of his neighborhood. It became obvious things were no good in the neighborhood when the SWAT team showed up, Daley said, and started shooting flash grenades onto the renter's patio.

But it's not just serious felons and drug dealers who are victimizing naive landlords. Mundane misfortunes are far more common — tenants who trash houses, who don't pay rent, who have loud parties, who get the cops called. Seminar audience member Julie would not give her last name, out of embarrassment. She rented a second house in southeast Las Vegas to a friend of a friend she thought seemed OK. Because they had a mutual acquaintance, Julie didn't require a deposit, and didn't look into the tenant's employment history, credit history, criminal history or any of the other histories Daley recommends poking around in.

So Julie's tenant paid rent one month out of three and then vanished. Julie found out when a neighbor called to announce a moving truck was parked outside her house. By the time Julie got there, the place was cleared out — and covered in cat urine.

She sat quietly through Daley's two-hour seminar, listened closely, accepted multiple handouts, and shuffled through the door when the seminar was done.

She might be done, too. Asked whether she'd rent her home to someone again, Julie said, "I think I'm through."

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Discussion: 9 comments so far...By [Lenny_V](#)

8/30/08 at 4:19 a.m.

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Although there's no harm in warning people to be smart about who they rent their property to or let move into their homes, a couple of examples hardly make it an epidemic.

By [neiman1](#)

8/30/08 at 6:01 a.m.

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When society and the police fail to stop crime they put the burden and responsibility on the citizens complete with penalties. Now we can all start checking each other out and spying on each other. What seems wrong with this?

By [casinokid](#)

8/30/08 at 9:25 a.m.

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I rent houses out and heres what i screen for.

1. Child Support arrearages.
2. Evictions Or Judgements.
3. Sexual Offenders.

I also dont own property in the casino industry area so i will not rent to those who depend on tips as there wage (reason being I cant get my money through garnishment) the laws in my area will only allow me to garnish a small % of a 2.75 an hour job.

And i have found that it is easier to get a Judgement than it is to collect on it.

By [Planetearthcalling](#)

8/30/08 at 10:48 a.m.

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I would'nt get to carried away on the screening of potential renters.

No evictions should be your primary concern.

No judgements by previous landlords should also be a primary concern.

Length of time at previous residence going back at least two years should also be a requirement as well. This should be verifiable. If not, don't let them have the keys.

If they have moved frequently during this short period of time don't let them have the keys to your house.

Verify employment. Time on the job and do they make enough money to pay the rent. Also do they have all the money to cover move in costs. First & last plus deposit.

Limit the number of people and pets allowed to live at property on the lease

There are no doubt perfect renters out there with perfect credit. But they will be few and far between.

From someone who's been there.

By [homer](#)

8/30/08 at 11:21 a.m.

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neiman1, In the real world everyone has a responsibility to be aware of their surroundings. For generations neighbors looked out for each other and the police were seldom called. Criminals knew where they could go and where they could not. Only someone with a troubled past, bad intentions, a criminal record or a guilty conscious would express an opinion like yours.

By [buzzbomb](#)

8/30/08 at 11:29 a.m.

[Suggest removal](#)

Never rent to someone out of sympathy. Not enough room here to tell you about some hard lessons learned!

By [NevadaFive](#)

8/30/08 at 7:58 p.m.

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Hmmmm... Talk about "big brother." Now we have Metro deciding who can rent and who can't? Scaring people with these little "forums?" I have been a proud renter in Las Vegas for 30 out of the 35 years I've lived here. Five years I had my own house. I have lived in at least 20 different apartments - some for one or two months and others for as long as 8 years. This was my preference and I know that I threw a lot of money away avoiding home ownership. But, only one apartment manager ever, ever gave me back my so-called "security" deposit. The big complexes and the small would find any reason what-so-ever to deny me - from "the check is in the mail," to (and this is unbelievable but true) that it cost them \$1,000 to "overhaul" because of nicotine stains, and that was one apartment I lived in for only six months. Of course, I never paid such - and it has never appeared on my credit report. In fact, I have never (outside of one) received a refund of my "security" deposits (anywhere from \$50 to \$400). I just considered this "deposit" part of the overall rent and doing business with what should be a highly regulated business - yes, we need some form of RENT CONTROL in Clark County. We don't have it because renters do not vote. Homeowners do - that is why Metro can get away with this. Furthermore, it might be time for Metro to "rate" all renters - so we know where we stand. Or, hold these classes for renters as well. That'll be the day, eh?

The few stories in this article highlighting the "mom and pop" apartment disasters are few and far between. It is more likely that mom and pop are ripping off their tenants and breaking other laws. So, my heart does not go out to the urine soaked house homeowner - aferall - it is just part of doing business - get used to it or go cry to your mortgage company!! And, be glad that your house was not burned to the ground. I mean accidents can happen.

By [Lenny_V](#)

8/31/08 at 12:18 a.m.

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Homer, you're attacking neiman because he questions whether it's a good idea for americans to spy on other americans. You're a goofball, neiman is right.

By [hereinvegas](#)

8/31/08 at 2:12 p.m.

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We all have our ups and downs in life, but how far down has one gone? That is my main concern for renting. A felony conviction does not mean a bad tennant. Of course a repeat

offenders and sexual crimes are a huge red flag and personally will not rent to these people. I have had perfect tenants who I thought had good intentions, but even the best intended people have their down sides. I've been looked in the eye and shook hands with an almost perfect credit score tenant with no criminal background, and guess what? He skipped out damaged my home and took everything that could be detached. On the other hand I had a tenant that seemed shady and he turned out to be one of the best tenants, took care of my home and even repaired things on his own. Of course you will get screwed on your rentals, it's a rental. The tenants don't have the same interests you do, most are trying to make ends meet and feed their family's. I collect rent on the first of every month in person. I like to see my investments first hand. Metro and "rent control" is for the birds, take the time to get to know your tenants, show them some respect. You will be surprised by the return in the end. ANYONE ANYTIME can screw you! Caveat venditor!! (Latin for "let the seller beware").

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