

The Perfect Pet Policy

Pets are a thorn in the side of many property owners and property management teams. While they can be destructive to property and cause problems between tenants, many tenants will not move into an apartment that does not allow their pets to come with them. In this post, we discuss pet policy considerations.

For many people, pets are a part of the family and they enrich the lives of their human companions. This is what makes setting an effective pet policy difficult.

The most important thing to understand is that every apartment complex or property management team should have a firm policy when it comes to renting to tenants with pets. You cannot apply a different pet policy to every potential tenant who comes through the door. There must be clear decisions made, and then those decisions need to be enforced throughout the property on a consistent basis.

The need for an apartment pet policy is one of the only rules that applies to all property management teams. Different property owners will implement different policies, and you may even have different policies from one of your communities to another. Keep reading to learn what your options are, and then decide how to combine these options to create the perfect pet policy for your properties.

Pet Deposits

The pet deposit has to be enough to protect you against potential damages, but it cannot be so high that it is prohibitive for pet owners. Typically, this deposit is no higher than the standard deposit collected for the living unit at the time of move-in.

Pet Discrimination

Some pet policies will allow certain types of pets while forbidding others. For example, your apartment pet policy may allow small dogs under a

certain weight while forbidding larger dogs or breeds known for aggressive behaviors.

Cats are often forbidden because if they are not properly cared for they can soil carpets and cause foul odors from unclean litter boxes. The same goes for puppies, since they tend to tear into carpeting and walls and sometimes “do their business” indoors when they are not properly cared for around the clock.

You will want to forbid animals that are considered dangerous. For example, this would include an apartment pet policy that forbids certain breeds of dogs, like Pit Bulls or Rottweilers. Your list could be based on insurance considerations and guidelines as well as on your own research on statistics of dog related injuries.

You should also think about pets that are kept in cages or aquariums. Most properties do not worry about hamsters and fish, but they may be against having caged birds in living units. Your pet policy should be specific to your allowance for these types of pets as well.

Personal Approval

Some pet policies simply require tenants to get individual pets approved prior to bringing them into the community. This allows property management to personally meet each pet and judge their temperament. They can then decide whether they feel a pet is a good fit for the community or not.

Designated Pet Areas

If you do allow pets into your apartment complex, you have to consider where they should be taken to run around for recreation and perform other essential “duties.”. Your policy should require that tenants clean up after their pets, including using appropriate bags to properly dispose of their waste.

Designate out-of-the-way areas for pet play and potty breaks.

If you don't have areas that can be designated to this purpose, then your community may not be suitable for larger pets.

Pet waste can be difficult to monitor on an ongoing basis, and other residents will grow angry if pet waste is collecting in areas they walk. If one tenant refuses to pick up after their pet, then you can guarantee other tenants will start to neglect these duties as well. You have to be consistent to enforce this policy at all times.

Pet Registration and Vaccination

Many pet policies require that tenants keep their dogs registered, and that they wear the proper tags at all times. This makes it easy to identify who pets belong to, and ensures that only legal pets are in your community. Similarly, it is a good idea to require that all pets be kept up-to-date with vaccinations. This reduces the risk of pet illnesses or illnesses that could lead to destructive behavior.

Insurance

In some states and cities, landlords are allowed to require tenants to carry renter's insurance that will cover damages caused by pets. If your state allows this, it should be an addition to your policy which gives your property some extra coverage. Just understand that it can be difficult to ensure all tenants are keeping these policies current, since they could provide proof of signing up and then stop paying for or fail to renew the policy later on.

Noise Control

Just as you can require tenants to control noise so they do not disturb others, you can require the same of pet owners. Apartment pet policy should mention keeping pets quiet so others are not disturbed by barking and other noises.

Enforcement and Consistency

If you manage just one apartment complex, then you should set one pet policy and ensure that it is enforced with every tenant. There is no room to

make exceptions, since this policy is set in place to protect your property, and your tenants. Your pet policy should be incorporated into your lease as a pet agreement. Every tenant should sign this, not just those moving in with pets in the beginning. Your agreement should specify that you are to be notified if new or additional pets are taken into the property at a later date.

If you own multiple rental apartment communities, then you may set a different policy for each of these rental communities. If you have some units that are suitable to pets and others that do not allow pets, you can cater to pet lovers as well as those who may not want to live around pets. Ultimately, your perfect pet policy will protect your property while allowing tenants to live the lifestyle they choose to live.

If you don't want to mess with pets and the potential problems that come with them, you can always simply forbid them. Just know that you will turn away many good prospective tenants who simply cannot live without their pets.

What's your pet policy? Any big success or disaster stories? Please share your thoughts and experiences.

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