

# The Tenant



*Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations  
- Fighting for Tenants' Rights since 1974 -*

Winter/Spring 2008

In this Issue:

★ Greetings!

★ Fire Safety!

★ Smart Meters!

## Greetings!

By Geordie Dent

My name is Geordie Dent and I have been hired as the New Hotline Coordinator for the FMTA. After 6 years of loyal and excellent service for the Federation, my predecessor Emmy Pantin has gone back to school. She has left tremendously big shoes to fill.

In her time at the FMTA, Emmy contributed greatly to the Hotline and I hope to continue her trend. In the next 6 months I hope to continue to provide a high level of service to our members and all residents in the city of Toronto to help ensure their

See Greetings!, page 3

## Fire Safety and Tenants

By Dan McIntyre

The recent fires in Toronto – most recently the Queen Street fire on February 20 – should give all tenants reason to pause and consider their own safety from fire.

The FMTA has joined the call to increase fire safety inspections and to force all landlords to meet their requirements under the Fire Code. We have recently written to the Fire Chief, the Fire Marshall, and the Premier on this urgent issue.

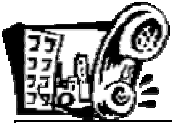
However, it is also important that we all take individual responsibility to help prevent fires and to protect ourselves. Here are a few tips:

- Check your smoke alarms regularly. A good suggestion is to check at least twice a year. Although it is the legally a property owner's responsibility, your first objective is

safety, so ensure that the batteries are replaced.

- Store and dispose combustible items properly.
- Know your escape route. Every building should have a posted fire evacuation plan. If there isn't one, demand that the property owner make one, or in a smaller building situation, you might design one yourself.
- Protect your pets. Some tenants have a sign on their door so the fire department will know there is a pet in the unit.
- Consider purchasing insurance. Although many property owners try to force tenants to buy insurance, we think that the issue of insurance is a personal risk assessment and a premium of a couple hundred dollars a year may be worth it to

See Fire, last page



## Ask the Hotline

By Howard Tessler

**Question:** Who is responsible for snow removal—the landlord or the tenant? I couldn't get my car out after the last snow storm—there was so much snow and no one cleared it away. I spoke to the property owner and they said it wasn't their responsibility. Is that true?

**Answer:** In large apartment buildings the landlord is responsible for maintaining the common areas in good conditions. This would mean that the parking lot and entrance way is free from obstacles preventing access to and from the building.

In smaller buildings, the responsibility for snow removal may depend on the tenancy agreement you have with the property owner. If your tenancy agreement says that it is your responsibility to clear the snow, then it is. If there is nothing in your tenancy agreement about snow removal, the responsibility falls on the property owner to remove the snow.

If the property owner says that another tenant in your building is responsible, ask the tenant if they are – property owners have been known to say different things to different tenants.

**Snow removal is covered by the Toronto Municipal Code [Property Standards 629-23.B]:**  
**“Steps, landings, walks, driveways, parking spaces, ramps and similar areas of a yard shall be cleared of snow and ice within 24 hours of a snowfall to provide safe access and egress for persons and vehicles”**

<h1>Tenant Resource</h1>	<p>The Ontario Human Rights Code says that it is against the law in Ontario for anyone to treat you unfairly or to refuse to rent you an apartment because of your Race, Sex, Colour, Nationality, Place of Origin, Sexual Orientation, Age and/or Religion.</p> <p>The Human Rights Code also says that you may not be discriminated against because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are pregnant or have children</li> <li>• You are on welfare or government assistance</li> <li>• You are a person living with a disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are single, separated, divorced or living common law</li> <li>• You are sixteen or seventeen and living away from your parents</li> </ul> <p>Tenants who are looking for housing are often vulnerable to property owners that try to discriminate against them for reasons that are protected by the Human Rights Code. If you think that you have been discriminated against, or have more questions about discrimination, you can call the <b>Tenant Hotline at 416-921-9494</b> or <b>CERA at 416-944-0087</b>.</p>
<p><b>CERA</b></p>		
<p>The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) is an Ontario-based non-profit human rights organization that promotes human rights in housing and challenges discrimination. CERA works to remove the barriers that keep disadvantaged individuals and families from accessing and retaining the housing they need.</p>		

Greetings! Continued from Front Page

rights as tenants are upheld.

I have a long and diverse history of fighting for tenants' rights that goes back many years. Originally from Vancouver, I have worked on tenant and housing issues with street children in Indonesia, students in British Columbia, government workers in Norway and the homeless in Vancouver's Downtown East-side.

I am a passionate advocate for social housing, tenant rights and rent control and am happy to be working for a Federation which advocates for these issues. While the FMTA pushes for these issues to be addressed, the Hotline and its counselors are actively keeping a close watch on emerging trends raised by tenants like you who call the Hotline.

Informing tenants of their rights and taking their concerns to legislators puts the FMTA on the front line of tenants' issues. Your continued support of the FMTA allows us to help tenants and uncover new problems. In my first public task for the FMTA I would like to thank you for your support, without which we would not be able to exist.

# Smart Metering

By Jed Kilbourn

In many (if not most) multi-unit apartment buildings, hydro-electricity is run on a building-by-building not unit-by-unit basis. What this means is that instead of having a hydro meter in each apartment, the building has a meter that measures overall usage. As tenants, we pay for that usage in our rent.

Smart metering is a strategy that the Ontario government favours because it encourages energy conservation by giving a precise reading of how much electricity an individual household is using. Smart metering involves putting digital usage meters in each apartment, which means that a household can better monitor the amount of energy they use and when they use it. This means that households are better able to reduce their overall energy consumption and not use hydro during peak usage periods.

This push toward increased energy efficiency is the result of understanding that we all have a role to play in combating global warming and climate change. If we can all learn to use energy more efficiently, we can begin to

reduce the strain on hydroelectric (power) plants and by extension, the environment.

That sounds really reasonable, right? So what's the concern?

The main concern with smart metering is that the responsibility falls on tenants to reduce their energy consumption, however, tenants have very little control over the things in their apartment that consume the most energy. Sure, we can turn off lights, but unless a refrigerator is less than ten years old, it is probably not energy efficient. In addition, not everyone can change the times they use energy. For example, tenants with children may need to use energy at peak times.

Further to that, tenants also don't have control over the energy efficiency of the building as a whole (for example, if the building is heated with electricity, but the windows aren't energy efficient). Sections 137 and 138 of the Residential Tenancies Act permit property owners to put smart meters in their buildings, however, they must follow a very specific procedure – one of the most important parts is that they must gauge the energy usage of a unit for a year before requiring a tenant to pay the

See Smart Meters, last page

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Smart Meters, Continued from page 3

utility cost. Further, the monthly cost determined in that first year must be deducted from a tenant's rent.

The smart metering sections of the RTA (137 & 138) have **not** been proclaimed yet, though we have received an increase in the number of calls to the Hotline about this issue – if you are concerned about smart metering or have more questions, call the **Tenant Hotline** at **416-921-9494**.

Fire, Continued from front page

you. Make sure you know what the policy covers and does not cover.

- Make sure that the property owner checks all the fire safety equipment (like fire extinguishers) regularly.
- Call the Fire Department if you have concerns about the fire safety in your building. They have authority to enforce the Fire Code.

If you are a victim of a fire, you do have rights and there are many community agencies that can help you.

- Keep good records and keep track of any expenses result from the fire. You should know what you own, and what your losses might be.
- If your building is damaged but not destroyed, make sure that you know your rights to re-occupy the unit when repaired.

If you have more questions, call us!

**Visit our website! [www.torontotenants.org](http://www.torontotenants.org)**

**Become a member of the FMTA!**

I will pay my membership dues by:

Cheque or money order  
(made out to FMTA)

Cash

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. #: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes! I would like to donate \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the FMTA!

Type of membership:

New Member  Renewal

- Individual: \$15/year
- Senior, student or unemployed: \$5/year
- Sustaining Member: \$50/year
- Homeowner (non-voting): \$25/year
- Organization (non-voting): \$25/year
- Tenants' Association: \_\_\_\_\_ units, \$10/year /unit (minimum 3 units)