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Page 1 of 1

Smokers leave costs behind when moving out

Study says owners have to pay about \$5,000 on average

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Smokers cost apartment owners an average of \$4,935 to clean up after them, according to a study from UCLA released Thursday.

When a smoker moves out, landlords have to make significant renovations to remove the smell, ranging from replacing the carpet to new appliances.

Added together, smokers cost landlords \$18 million a year, the study said.

The research comes just as Gov. Jerry Brown must decide whether or not to sign legislation that would clear up landlord's right to ban smoking in units they own, and some California localities ban smoking in apartments.

The average cost of cleaning an apartment didn't surprise representatives from the San Diego County Apartment Association.

"A mild smoker, someone who doesn't smoke too heavily, (a landlord is) going to replace carpet and padding, and seal walls and paint the walls," said Alan Pentico, spokesman for the association. "A heavy smoker, you have to seal concrete, replace refrigerators, replace vinyl floors, replace window fixtures, repaint the walls, repaint molding, and (replace) cabinets."

Pentico said depending on the damage, a landlord could end up spending \$500 to \$7,000 fixing up apartments after a smoker moves out.

Current law on allowing smoking in apartments is hazy, Pentico said.

Apartment owners can't deny smokers an apartment if one is available, but they can enforce no-smoking policies.

The distinction, Pentico said, is that you can put a clause in the lease that says no smoking in the apartments, and evict them if they do.

If Brown signs the bill into law, it would codify current practice, he said.

At the local level, some California cities and towns are moving to ban smoking in apartments.

Belmont began enforcing such a law in 2009, and a similar law will take effect in Calabasas on Jan. 1.

Pentico said his members would prefer to leave the choice of banning smoking up to landlords, because some apartments are more likely to have smokers than others.

"We try to tell the jurisdictions, give landlords time to ramp up to it," Pentico said. "The lower the income, the higher the propensity to smoke. In some buildings, you could have 40 percent to 50 percent of tenants (who are smokers)."

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