

HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS (HQS)

What are Housing Quality Standards?

Housing Quality Standards (HQS) are minimum property standards that have been approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). San Benito Housing Authority (SBHA) is required to enforce these federal property standards on a local level. The goal of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program is to provide decent, safe and sanitary housing at an affordable cost to low-income families.

When Are HQS Inspections Conducted?

To ensure program participants are residing in quality housing, HUD requires SAHA to inspect units at initial occupancy and at least annually thereafter. Types of inspections include:

- **Initial / Move-In Inspection** - This inspection is in response to a request from the family to approve a unit for participation in the HCV program. The unit must pass inspection before the effective date of the Housing Assistance Payment Contract (HAPC). If the Inspector determines that the unit is not move-in ready, the inspection will be rescheduled.
- **Annual Inspections** - This is a yearly update of the unit's condition to ensure participants are complying with their responsibilities. This inspection also allows SBHA to verify that the owner is maintaining the property in a decent, safe and healthy condition.
- **Complaint Inspection** - Conducted when there is a complaint about the unit originating from a participant, landlord or other concerned party.
- **Emergency Inspection** - Conducted when life-threatening conditions are present, such as lack of security for the unit, major plumbing leaks, natural gas leak or fumes, inoperable or missing smoke detectors, etc.
- **Quality Control Inspection** - HUD requires that a sample of units be re-inspected by a supervisor or other qualified individual to ensure that HQS is being enforced correctly and uniformly by all Inspectors.

What Are the 13 Key Aspects of HQS?

The 13 key aspects are:

1. Sanitary facilities
2. Food preparation and refuse disposal
3. Space and security
4. Thermal environment
5. Illumination and electricity
6. Structure and materials
7. Interior air quality
8. Water supply
9. Lead-based paint

10. Access
11. Site and neighborhood
12. Sanitary conditions
13. Smoke detectors

What Happens If a Unit Fails Inspection?

- Inspectors will document the deficiencies on a Failed Items Inspection Report, which is then provided to the landlord and the participant.
- After a follow-up inspection letter is issued, the owner is given at least 30 days on initial/move-in inspections to complete the necessary repairs. For annual inspections, repairs must be made within 15 days or 24 hours for life-threatening emergencies.
- SBHA will re-inspect the unit within the allotted time.
- If the deficiencies are not corrected, the unit will receive a failure rating for the final inspection.
- If the deficiencies are the owner's responsibility and they are not corrected, the housing assistance payment contract (HAPC) will terminate effective the last day of the month following the final failed inspection (i.e., final failed inspection May 28; contract terminates effective May 31).
- If the deficiencies are the participant's responsibility and they are not corrected, the HAPC will terminate when the participant's assistance is terminated, generally 30 days after the month in which the unit final failed inspection (i.e., final fail inspection May 28; contract terminates effective June 30).

Units sometimes fail inspections because landlords and participants are not familiar with HQS requirements and/or have not assessed the condition of the unit prior to the scheduled inspection. For these reasons, SBHA encourages you to conduct pre-inspections prior to the scheduled inspection to ensure commonly failed items are corrected before the inspection.

What Are Common HQS Deficiencies?

- **Entry doors:** Entry doors must lock securely. Check the weather-stripping (i.e., if there are gaps that let air in, weather-stripping must be applied), the doorjamb and the strike plate for defects.
- **Windows:** Windows that are designed to open must open and have permanent lock attached (sticks and thumbscrews are not accepted as locking devices). The windowpanes must not be broken or cracked.
- **Electrical Aspects:** Units must be free of electrical hazards. All outlets and switches must have cover plates intact and be secured to the wall with no exposed wiring. All light fixtures must work and be properly mounted to the wall or ceiling. Breaker boxes must have all open spaces filled with knockouts or blank spacers with no exposed wires.
- **Oven / Range:** The oven / range must be sufficiently clean and not constitute a fire hazard. Burners must lay flat and all elements must work properly. All knobs and dials must be on the appliance. Filter screens should be installed over the fans.

- **Refrigerator:** The refrigerator must have a snugly-fit, rubber, intact gasket around the door. Loose and/or cracked gaskets must be replaced. The kick-plate at the bottom of the refrigerator must be secured properly.
- **Heating & Plumbing:** All heating and plumbing must be in working order. All adequate heat sources should be clear of furniture, bedding, clothing and other items. Oil, gas and propane furnaces must be safe and professionally serviced at least once every two years. Plumbing fixtures (i.e., sinks, toilets, showers, etc.) should be free of leaks.
- **Hot Water Heaters:** Hot water heaters must have a pressure relief valve and discharge line that extends to within six inches of the floor. Discharge tubing must be made of the appropriate type of material: galvanized steel, copper or chlorinated polyvinyl chloride (CPVC) piping, not polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Wires should not be exposed. In addition, flammable material should not be stored near the hot water tank.
- **Flooring:** Any flooring that poses a tripping hazard or is frayed or torn must be replaced or repaired (i.e., carpets, vinyl, tile, or linoleum). Exposed carpet tacks or thresholds that are loose must be repaired. Please check and repair floors that have dry rot. This issue is commonly found in the bathroom, particularly around the bathtub and toilet.
- **Smoke Detectors:** Smoke detectors must have a tester button and must be on each floor of the unit. If a participant has impaired hearing, it is suggested that a smoke alarm designed for the hearing-impaired be mounted in the bedroom occupied by that individual.
- **Ventilation:** Ventilation system must be operable. Inoperable bathroom fans or no ventilation (i.e., window) will result in a failed rating.
- **Decks / Railings / Steps:** Any decks, railings or steps that have stairways with four or more consecutive steps must have a handrail and be free of dry rot and tripping hazards. The handrail must run the length of the stairway and be securely supported. Railings are required for decks, porches or steps that are more than 30 inches from the ground.
- **Deteriorating / Peeling Paint:** Deteriorating / peeling paint must not be present for a unit built prior to 1978. This applies to the inside of the unit and outside of the building if children under the age of six will occupy the unit. SBHA requires the removal of all deteriorated paint from interior and exterior surfaces.