



# SAFETY TIPS FOR VACATION RENTAL HOMEOWNERS

In the interest of helping all our homeowners provide the safest possible environment for their guests we wanted to provide the following tips. Here are some guidelines to consider, as suggested by our friends at On the Water in Maine Vacation Rentals. The safety of your home is solely the homeowner's responsibility. We provide these recommendations as a resource to you. Nauset Rental strongly recommends doing a safety check of your home and addressing any and all issues before the start of the rental season. A qualified home inspector or similar resource is a great way to do this if you do not feel comfortable or qualified. In addition to being the right thing to do, addressing issues such as old smoke detectors and replacing batteries can prevent mid rental season urgent issues when alarms sound due to expiration or failing batteries. Now is the time to inspect and address any issues!

*Wishing you a wonderful and safe rental season,*

The Nauset Rental Team

### **Inspect the Vacation Property Grounds**

- Scan the entire property, from the street and from several angles in the yard. Look for problem areas such as inadequate lighting or tree branches that hang dangerously close to power lines or touch the roof. Exterior lights should function properly and light the entry areas from the parking areas. Note hazard trees that could have “widow makers” hanging off them and have them addressed. Note trees that could fall on the home in a windstorm.
- Inspect the driveway, sidewalk and other finished walkways. Are the surfaces smooth and even? Walking across even slight irregularities can be challenging for older or disabled individuals. Add pea stone or another base to dirt or gravel driveways with bare or muddy spots where water collects due to improper sloping.
- Enter outbuildings such as sheds and barns that any renter may have access to, or ensure they are locked up tight. Test the doors for stability. Check any special features, such as lighting or windows, to make sure they are in good working order.
- Walk out onto any docks or piers and do a full safety inspection. Make sure all bolts and fasteners holding docks or piers together are in good condition. Make sure no nails or splinters are coming out of the wood. Test swim ladders and look around the dock for hazards in the water. Is there enough water (at all tides – ocean) for diving? If not, are there signs warning against it? Would you want your 3-year-old child running down and playing on this dock or pier?
- Check all swings and hammocks for issues. Put your full body weight in any hammocks and ensure hooks in the trees or on the stands are secure. Are branches or swing-set bases that kids could swing off of secure?

## Inspect the Vacation Home Exterior

- Pay attention to the windows. In the event of a fire and a renter needs to escape out a window – will they be able to? Will storm windows or painted-on screens prevent that?
- Check the stairs leading to the dwelling. Bounce on them to test their stability. If you feel any 'give' to the steps, have the Property Owner replace or reinforce them immediately.
- Check deck/patio railings. All decks or patios higher than 30" above grade must have railings. If there is a guardrail or railing on a deck lower than 30" it must still meet code requirements. Building code requires them at least 36" tall (42" in apartment buildings) and you will want to ensure that no child can slip under the railing and fall off the deck (a 4-inch-diameter ball should not pass between the balusters). Rope or nets can be used to ensure that children can safely use the deck without falling off. Handrails on one side are required for steps with 4 or more risers.
- Grab railings along steps or surrounding decks, porches and other areas. Pull on them to test for stability. The railing should be able to resist a 200-pound concentrated load horizontally against the top of it in any direction. Replace or reinforce flimsy rails immediately.
- Look closely at the connection between porches, decks or other additions and the building itself. Is the deck pulling away from the house? Do you see evidence of structural or moisture damage? Is it rotting? Too much weight on a deck could cause it to collapse. A well constructed deck uses screws, not nails, to hold it together.
- Sit in and test all deck/lawn chairs for stability and any issues that may cause them to collapse. Throw away any plastic/resin chairs that have cracks in them.
- Ensure fire pits, gas and charcoal grills, and any other outdoor cooking devices are in good working order. Specifically check gas grills for grease build-up, rusty or corroded burners and placement. Gas grills should be at least 3 feet away from any building – charcoal grills should not be on a deck or wooden structure. No grills should be set up to be able to be used under a roof or overhang.
- Test ground-fault interrupters, which must be installed in all outside outlets, to ensure they operate properly. (GFCI Outlet Tester \$8).

## Inspect the Vacation Home Interior

- Check the entry door and every door leading to the outside for a good fit in the frame – neither too loose nor sticking stubbornly when pulled – as well as proper locks, doorknobs and other hardware and structural stability. Open and close to test functioning. Can a renter get out all doors in an emergency easily?
- Flip every light switch. Are they all in working order? Do any heat up or spark? If so, contact an electrician right away to resolve any issues.
- Look at wall outlets. Are any black, scorched or dangling from the walls? Are any faceplates missing? Does each one work? Test each one if there is any doubt. Faulty electrical wiring is a leading cause of fires.
- Send paint chips in for lead testing if the dwelling was built before 1978, when lead-based paint was banned in the United States. If unknown, then test anyway.
- Watch for mold and/or mildew. Dark, round stains may indicate moisture damage that can lead to mold. A musty smell is a possible mold indicator. Look at walls, the ceiling, around doors and windows, inside dark cabinets and similar areas to detect mold. *Homes should not be rented with mold in them – set up for abatement right away to remove mold before renting the home.*

- Check the window interiors and inner surfaces for condensation or black mildew indicating a moisture problem. Treat mold with bleach or a mixture of half vinegar, half water. Fix the underlying problem and hidden mold immediately.
- Open and close all windows to ensure they open properly. Check the locks to make sure they work. Renter should be able to escape out a window in the event of a fire or another emergency.
- Notice the floors. Soft areas – *you will know it when you encounter one* – require immediate attention. Sloping floors may be a result of structural or foundation problems. A sloping floor in an old cottage or cabin doesn't mean that it is necessarily unsafe. Make sure that you know why the floor is sloping and have an expert examine it to make sure no structural failure is imminent. Repair or replace damaged flooring. Make sure surfaces are flush or safely transition from one level to another. At a minimum, make sure they are clearly marked so renters don't trip.
- Inspect interior stairs and loft ladders carefully. Pull on railings to make certain they are strong. Notice any give in the steps and repair immediately. Replace damaged treads or other stair parts.
- Clean the dust & dirt off of coils on the rear of refrigerators, fireplaces and chimneys, stove exhausts, and similar items annually. Build up of dust in these areas can lead to a fire.
- **Check smoke & CO detectors. Make sure all meet state and local legal requirements for location and type. Any smoke detectors older than 10 years and CO detectors older than 7 years should be replaced. 3 out of 5 home fire deaths occur in homes without working smoke alarms. Why replace detectors after a certain time? After 10 (smoke) or 7 (CO) years, their sensors can begin to lose sensitivity.** The test button only confirms that the battery, electronics, and alert system are working; it doesn't mean that the smoke sensor is working. To test the sensor, use an aerosol can of smoke alarm test spray that simulates smoke. (Sold on Amazon.com as Smoke-in-a-Can for smoke detectors \$12 and SDI Solo C6 CO Detector Tester for CO detectors \$25). Photoelectric Smoke Detectors are typically preferred over Ionization smoke detectors because they are more likely to catch smoldering fires, which often start overnight while people are sleeping. Ionization detectors typically only catch fast-flame and cooking related fires. First Alert Dual Sensor Smoke & Fire Alarms \$24. Stand-alone CO Detectors like the First Alert CO615 \$24, that have a digital readout, are preferred over combination CO/Smoke units.
- If the property uses propane or natural gas for cooking or heating, take a look at visible gas plumbing for any signs of issue. Smell for leaks. Make sure all propane or oil furnace exhausts are working properly to prevent CO leaks into the property. Installing explosive gas alarms near appliances that use gas is highly recommended. (First Alert GCO1CN \$40)
- Check for poisons/mouse/ant bait stations that should be put out of reach of children.
- Check for carpets and runners that need anti-slip pads underneath them to keep them from slipping across the floor or becoming trip hazards.
- Ensure all sleeping areas/rooms have more than one exit (window and door). (Make sure storm windows are up or removed in summer.)
- Basements that contain one or more sleeping rooms are required to have emergency escape and rescue openings (doors or windows) that easily lead out to a space to escape easily away from the dwelling (Section 1029 of National Building Code).

### Inspect the Vacation Home Kitchen

- Check the stove. Are all the knobs present? Do the burners and oven work? Is there excessive grease build-up on the oven, stove, or exhaust venting? *Do a deep clean if necessary.*

- Test garbage disposals, dishwashers, or other supplied appliances. Note any problems. *Make sure garbage disposal switches are safely away from the sinks.*
- Check over all appliances including electric mixers, blenders, and coffee maker for any obvious issues.
- Test ground-fault interrupters, which must be installed in kitchen outlets, to ensure they operate properly. Look for others throughout the residence, especially near water and test them as well.

### **Bathroom Specific Safety**

- Test ground-fault interrupters, which must be installed in the bathroom outlets, to ensure they operate properly.

### **Basements, Garages and Utility Rooms at Vacation Homes**

- *Decide what areas of a rental property that renters need to access and lock off any area that that renters shouldn't. Does a renter need access to the basement? Why? If it were to reset circuit breakers, wouldn't you want to know if and why breakers are tripping before letting a renter just reset them on their own? Does a renter need access to the garage? Why? To put trash in it? Have you considered an outside refuse receptacle?*
- Visit the basement, attic, or garage if renters are being given any access to those areas of the property. Note the general shape of the area. Many problems jump out at you if you step back and look closely.
- Check the electrical breaker box. Look for burned or scorched surfaces or blown breakers if outlets or lights are not working. *Consider restricting Renter access to the electrical breaker box.*
- Flip the emergency switch to turn on the furnace first *if applicable*. Turn on the heat and Air Conditioning. Call a professional immediately if you notice any strange noises, smells or the appliances fail to come on when the furnace/boiler/heater fires. Treat electric radiators and alternate heat sources similarly.
- Change forced hot-air furnace filters at the start of the rental season.
- Clear dryer vents annually. *Test a clean dryer vent by turning the dryer on high heat and then finding the outside exhaust. At the outside exhaust, check for good pressure and make sure the vent is clear of lint build-up. Also look in the area of the dryer where the lint filter goes and make sure that area has been cleaned of dryer lint.*

### **Amenities**

- If rental of the property includes boats or bikes, check all and **inspect between each renter**. Make sure proper insurance coverage is in effect to provide these amenities.
- Ensure that if a property offers spas, hot tubs, or pools that safety items are in place.
- Spas and hot tubs should have covers that have child-proof locks on them. Lockable fences should surround pools. Look for chemical treatment products. Make sure you have someone testing spa, hot tub, or pools weekly to ensure the water is treated properly.

*Note: The safety of your home is solely the homeowner's responsibility. We provide these recommendations merely as a resource to help you ensure your home is safe for guests. Nauset Rental is not a licensed home inspector and does not inspect homes for safety. Nauset Rental relies solely on owners and the vendors they choose to provide a safe environment for guests.*