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**CITY AGENCIES REMIND NEW YORKERS ABOUT
THE DANGERS OF ILLEGAL CONVERSIONS**

*Department of Buildings, FDNY and HPD to Host Education Campaign to Raise Awareness about the
Dangers of Illegally Converted Apartments throughout the City*

Buildings Commissioner Rick D. Chandler, PE, with FDNY Commissioner Daniel A. Nigro, and HPD Commissioner Vicki Been today announced the distribution of educational flyers warning New Yorkers about the dangers of illegally converted apartments. Starting today, the Departments will distribute more than 10,000 flyers to remind residents and property owners of the serious consequences of living in or creating illegal living conditions. The Community Affairs Units at Buildings and HPD's Office of Enforcement and Neighborhood Services, and FDNY's Fire Safety Education Unit will distribute flyers in multiple languages at major transportation hubs in all five boroughs.

"The purpose of this campaign is to help New Yorkers protect themselves against dangerous living situations," **said Buildings Commissioner Chandler**. "Illegal apartments often lack the number of required exits and in an emergency this can prove fatal for those who live there, as well as for first responders. If you know what to look for, it's possible to recognize an illegally converted apartment. Through our Living Safely campaign, our goal at Buildings is to provide New Yorkers with the information they need to choose safe housing for themselves and their families."

The Living Safely awareness campaign is part of the Department's aggressive approach to combating illegal conversions. It was launched after three men lost their lives in a tragic fire in an illegal cellar apartment in Woodside, Queens, on November 7, 2009. As a part of this ongoing effort, Department inspectors and community liaisons have handed out flyers in neighborhoods throughout the City where the most illegal conversion complaints are generated. Since 2009, more than 170,000 flyers have been provided to New Yorkers through the Living Safely campaign.

"We are proud to partner with the Department of Buildings to bring this critical fire safety message to New Yorkers throughout our city," **said Fire Commissioner Nigro**. "Illegally converted apartments present extremely dangerous conditions which can quickly trap both residents and Firefighters in the event of a fire. We know through this aggressive educational effort we will save lives."

"When spaces are illegally converted they can create obstacles that block or restrict egress in times of emergency, which can pose serious safety hazards to tenants and first responders," **said HPD Commissioner Vicki Been**. "Ensuring that both tenants and landlords know how to identify illegally converted spaces and understand our city's space and egress requirements can help save lives."

Illegal conversions are building units that have been altered to create additional housing without obtaining proper approvals from the Department. These units often lack adequate means of egress, proper windows and ventilation and have illegal and unsafe gas, electrical and plumbing systems. The flyers include safety tips such as the need for two means of egress, a working smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector and the dangers of using an extension cord as a main source of electricity.

In addition, the Buildings Department has issued 10 tips to help New Yorkers avoid illegally converted living situations and/or conditions. The following tips may be indicators that an apartment could be illegally converted:

- 1) Know the market. Be wary of units that advertise significantly lower price points for comparable apartments in the area.
- 2) Beware of the words “basement” or “attic.” Advertisements that use these words are often for apartments that typically lack adequate exits.
- 3) Avoid apartments that have rooms without windows or very small windows. These are often found in illegal cellar or basement apartments. Landlords will sometimes describe the ones with very small windows as “sunny” to entice renters.
- 4) Beware of the word “flex.” “Flex” implies that the apartment can be converted into a multi-bedroom unit using pressurized walls. The installation and/or construction of a wall without proper permits are illegal.
- 5) “Utilities included” is a red flag. A landlord may not want utilities under another name connected to the property because those residents would violate the legal occupancy of the building.
- 6) Avoid apartments with odd layouts. They are often described as “unique” or “interesting” and are oddly situated (i.e. a shower installed in the kitchen).
- 7) Be cautious when a landlord refuses to disclose the exact address. Landlords advertising illegal apartments may ask to meet a potential renter before exposing the address to possible regulation or penalty.
- 8) Beware of apartments where you can’t have mail delivered. Landlords advertising illegal apartments will often request that tenants obtain a separate P.O. Box.
- 9) Beware of no-lease apartments. Be suspicious of a landlord who declines to draw up a lease, requests a month-to-month agreement or requires cash payments.
- 10) Check for adequate means of egress and look out for locked doors in the unit. A tenant should be able to access all available exits either directly from the unit or a public hallway.

New Yorkers are encouraged to call 311 to report any non-compliant or unsafe construction conditions. For more information, please visit the Department’s website at www.nyc.gov/buildings

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