

Chapter 8.A.

HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS AND RENT REASONABLENESS DETERMINATIONS

[24 CFR 982 Subpart I and 24 CFR 982.507]

INTRODUCTION

Owners must maintain all units occupied by families receiving Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) assistance in accordance with housing quality standards. Units assisted under the program must comply with HUD's National Standards for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate (NSPIRE) regulations and standards no later than **February 1, 2027**. Until such time, the PHA may continue using the HQS inspection standard.

All units must pass HQS inspection prior to the approval of a lease and at least once every 24 months during the term of the contract, and at other times as needed, to determine that the unit meets HQS. HUD also requires the PHA to determine that rents for units under the HCV program are reasonable when compared to comparable unassisted units in the market area.

This chapter explains HUD and the PHA requirements related to housing quality and rent reasonableness as follows:

Part I. Physical Standards. This part discusses the physical standards required of units occupied by HCV-assisted families and identifies decisions about the acceptability of the unit that may be made by the family based upon the family's preference. It also identifies life threatening conditions that must be addressed on an expedited basis.

Part II. The Inspection Process. This part describes the types of inspections the PHA will make and the steps that will be taken when units do not meet HQS.

Part III. Rent Reasonableness Determinations. This part discusses the policies the PHA will use to make rent reasonableness determinations.

Special HQS requirements for homeownership, and other special housing types are discussed in Chapter 15 to the extent that they apply in this jurisdiction.

NSPIRE and HQS

Even once the HQS inspection standard has sunset, the regulations at 24 CFR Part 982 and 983 governing the HCV and PBV programs will continue to use the terms *HQS and housing quality standards rather than NSPIRE*. This is because the definition of *housing quality standards (HQS)* at 24 CFR 982.4 means the minimum quality standards developed by HUD in accordance with 24 CFR 5.703 for the HCV program, including any variations approved by HUD for the PHA. As such, the model policy uses the term *housing quality standards* whenever applicable regulations use this term. Except in the chapter describing HQS, the acronym *HQS* is not used in the model policy in order to avoid confusion between the umbrella term meaning housing standards and the specific inspection protocol. The model policy only uses the term *NSPIRE* when referring to specific NSPIRE standards.

Chapter 8.A.

Chapter 8.A.

PART I: PHYSICAL STANDARDS

8-I.A. GENERAL HUD REQUIREMENTS HUD

Performance and Acceptability Standards

This paragraph lists HUD's 13 acceptability standards and references two exhibits. Exhibit 8-1 provides a summary of the standards and Exhibit 8-2 identifies areas of tenant preference. HUD's performance and acceptability standards for HCV-assisted housing are provided in 24 CFR 982.401. These standards cover the following areas:

- Sanitary facilities
- Food preparation and refuse disposal
- Space and Security
- Thermal Environment
- Illumination and electricity
- Structure and materials
- Interior Air Quality
- Water Supply
- Lead-based paint
- Access
- Site and neighborhood
- Sanitary condition

A summary of HUD performance criteria is provided in Exhibit 8-1. Additional guidance on these requirements is found in the following HUD resources:

- Housing Choice Voucher Guidebook, Chapter 10.
- HUD Housing Inspection Manual for Section 8 Housing
- HUD Inspection Form, form HUD-52580 (3/01) and Inspection Checklist, form HUD-52580-A (9/00)
- HUD Notice 2003-31, Accessibility Notice: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and the Fair Housing Act of 1988.

NSPIRE Standards Applicable to HQS [HUD Letter 6/14/24 and PIH 2024-26, REV-1]

Even if the PHA is still under the HQS inspection standard, the PHA must apply the following requirements under NSPIRE:

- The NSPIRE standards for carbon monoxide **detectors and smoke** alarms are currently applicable even if the PHA has not yet transitioned to NSPIRE;
- The Visual Assessment Standard for Potential Lead-Based Paint Hazard in 24 CFR Part 35 Subparts M and H apply.

The carbon monoxide detectors requirement took effect and became an inspectable item on December 27, 2022. PHAs may directly follow the NSPIRE Carbon Monoxide standard or see Notice PIH 2022-01 for additional guidance on this requirement.

Chapter 8.A.

For smoke alarms, PHAs are already required to comply with the Federal Fire Safety Act of 1992 and keep HQS inspections current with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards. As of December 29, 2024, all smoke alarms must be either hard wired or sealed, 10-year battery devices.

PHAs that opt to retain HQS can continue to utilize previous HQS definitions and guidance, provided they are also in compliance with the above requirements.

Tenant Preference Items

HUD requires the PHA to enforce minimum HQS but also recognizes that certain judgments about the acceptability of the unit are left to the family. For example, the PHA must ensure that the unit contains the required sanitary facilities, but the family decides whether the cosmetic appearance of the facilities is acceptable. Exhibit 8-2 summarizes those items that are considered participant preferences.

Modifications to Provide Accessibility

Under the Fair Housing Act of 1988 an owner must not refuse the request of a family that contains a person with a disability to make necessary and reasonable modifications to the unit. Such modifications are at the family's expense. The owner may require restoration of the unit to its original condition if the modification would interfere with the owner or next occupant's full enjoyment of the premises. The owner may not increase a customarily required security deposit. However, the landlord may negotiate a restoration agreement that requires the family to restore the unit and, if necessary to ensure the likelihood of restoration, may require the participant to pay a reasonable amount into an interest-bearing escrow account over a reasonable period of time. The interest in any such account accrues to the benefit of the participant. The owner may also require reasonable assurances that the quality of the work will be acceptable and that any required building permits will be obtained. [24 CFR 100.203; Notice 2003-31].

Modifications to units to provide access for a person with a disability must meet all applicable HQS requirements and conform to the design, construction, or alteration of facilities contained in the UFAS and the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) [28 CFR 35.151(c) and Notice 2003-31] See Chapter 2 of this plan for additional information on reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities.

OHCD Policy

Any owner that intends to negotiate a restoration agreement or require an escrow account must submit the agreement(s) to OHCD for review.

8-I.B. ADDITIONAL LOCAL REQUIREMENTS

The PHA may impose variations to the HQS as long as the additional criteria are not likely to adversely affect the health or safety of participant families or severely restrict housing choice for families. HUD approval is required for variations to the HQS. HUD approval is not required if the PHA variations are clarifications of HUD's acceptability criteria or performance standards [24 CFR 982.401(a)(4)].

Chapter 8.A.

OHCD Policy

Four Things a Room MUST Have to be Considered a Bedroom:

- **Entrance:** A bedroom needs at least two methods of egress, so it should be accessible from the house (commonly through a door), and then have one other exit (window or door).
- **Ceiling Height:** A bedroom ceiling needs to be at least 7 ft. tall. It is okay if some of portion of the ceiling are below this level, but at least 50% of the ceiling needs to be a minimum of 7 ft. in height. Most ceilings tend to be at least 8 ft. tall.
- **Escape:** A bedroom must have one other method of egress beyond the entrance point. A door to the exterior works as an exit point and so does a window. According to the International Residential Code, a bedroom window can be between 24 and 44 inches from the floor, it needs at least 5.7 square feet for the opening, and it must measure no less than 24 inches height and 20 inches wide.
- **Size:** The bedroom should be at least 70 sq. ft. and more specifically the room cannot be smaller than 4 feet in a horizontal direction.

Prince William County Zoning Ordinances Section 32-300.13

The Prince William County Zoning Ordinance states:

- Properties can only have 1 kitchen unless a special permit was approved.
- There can be no more than 3 unrelated adults residing in a property.
- If room(s) or a basement is being rented the tenants must have access to the kitchen, laundry facility and full access to the entire property.
- No portion of a property being rented can be locked and/or separated for that tenant from the rest of the residents

In the event that a property violates this Zoning Ordinance the property is not eligible for consideration under the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Thermal Environment [HCV GB p.10-7]

The PHA must define a “healthy living environment” for the local climate. This may be done by establishing a temperature that the heating system must be capable of maintaining, that is appropriate for the local climate.

OHCD Policy

The heating system must be capable of maintaining an interior temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit between October 1 and May 1.

Clarifications of HUD Requirements

OHCD Policy

Walls – In areas where plaster or drywall is sagging, severely cracked or otherwise damaged, it must be repaired or replaced. Any exterior or interior services with peeling and chipping paint must be scraped and painted with two coats of unleaded paint or other suitable material.

Chapter 8.A.

Windows – All window sashes must be in good condition, solid and intact, and fit properly in the window frame. Damaged or deteriorated sashes must be replaced. Windows must be weather stripped as needed to ensure a watertight seal. Window screens must be in good condition (applies only if screens are present). Any room for sleeping must have a window. In the absence of mechanical ventilation, insect screens for windows are required for natural ventilation.

Doors – All exterior doors must be weather-tight to avoid any air or water infiltration, be lockable, have no holes, have all trim intact, and have a threshold. All interior doors must have no holes, have all trim intact and be openable without the use of a key.

Floors – All wood floors must be a smooth surface and sealed. Re-secure any loose or warped boards and make level. If flooring cannot be leveled, they must be replaced. All floors must be in a finished state, no plywood. All floors should have some type of base shoe trim or sealing for a “finished look”. Vinyl base shoe is acceptable for kitchens and baths. Carpeting, vinyl or ceramic floor covering should not have rips, tears or broken tile due to trip hazard.

Sinks – All sinks and commode water lines must have shut off values, unless faucets are wall mounted. Toilet should fit securely to the floor. All worn or cracked toilet seats and tank lids must be replaced and toilet tank lid fit properly. There should be no signs of water leaks from pipes. All sinks must have functioning stoppers.

Baths – All baths must have sink and water closet, which operate properly. If the bath has a tub, the tub must have a stopper. All faucets must be operational without leaks.

Bedrooms – Bedrooms in basements or attics are not allowed unless they meet local code requirements (including window) and must have adequate ventilation and emergency exit capacity. Minimum bedroom ceiling height 7’ 6” or local code, whichever is greater. Sloping ceilings may not slope to lower than five feet in the 70 square foot area.

Security – If window security bars or security screens are present on emergency exit windows, they must be equipped with a quick release system. The owner is responsible for ensuring that the family is instructed on the use of the quick release system. Owners are responsible for providing and replacing old batteries for battery powered smoke detectors. Tenants will be instructed not to tamper with smoke detectors or remove batteries. Smoke detectors are required on each floor. For properties with gas the owner is responsible for having carbon monoxide detectors on each floor with gas appliances (stove/heating system).

Roof and Gutters – Roof should not show signs of curling or missing shingles. If so roof needs to be patched or replaced. All gutters must be secured to the fascia board with down spouts away from the foundation of the house.

Chipping or Peeling Paint – If property shows signs of chipping and peeling paint the area must be repaired using “Safe Work Practices”.

Hot Water Heater – Hot Water Heaters must be connected properly and sized based upon number of people in the unit.

Chapter 8.A.

But if you only need a loose estimate of what size you need (versus an exact calculation), follow these guidelines:

- For 1 to 2 people: 30-40 gallons
- For 2 to 3 people: 40-50 gallons
- For 3 to 4 people: 50-60 gallons
- For 5+ people: 60-80 gallons

The Temperature Pressure Relief (TPR) discharge pipe requirement is "no more than 6 inches but no less than 2 inches" from the floor. The piping is to be constructed of only 3 possible materials: copper, galvanized steel or CPVC (not standard PVC).

8-I.C. LIFE-THREATENING CONDITIONS [24 CFR 982.404(a); FR Notice 1/18/17]

HUD requires the PHA to define life-threatening conditions and to notify the owner or the family (whichever is responsible) of the corrections required. The responsible party must correct life-threatening conditions within 24 hours of the PHA notification.

OHCD Policy

The following are considered life-threatening conditions:

- Any condition that jeopardizes the security of the unit
- Major plumbing leaks or flooding, waterlogged ceiling or floor in imminent danger of falling
- Structural hazard including imminent structural collapse
- Natural or LP gas or fuel oil leaks
 - A fuel storage vessel, fluid line, valve, or connection that supplies fuel to a HVAC unit is leaking or a strong odor is detected with potential for explosion or fire or that results in a health risk if inhaled
- Any electrical problem or condition that could result in shock or fire
 - A light fixture is readily accessible, is not securely mounted to the ceiling or wall, and electrical connections or wires are exposed
 - A light fixture is hanging by its wires
 - A receptacle (outlet) or switch is missing or broken, and electrical connections or wires are exposed
 - An open circuit breaker position is not appropriately blanked in a panel board, main panel board, or other electrical box that contains circuit breakers or fuses
 - A cover is missing from any electrical device box, panel box, switch gear box, control panel, etc., and there are exposed electrical connections
 - Any nicks, abrasions, or fraying of the insulation that exposes conducting wire
 - Exposed bare wires or electrical connections
 - Any condition that results in openings in electrical panels or electrical control device enclosures

Chapter 8.A.

- Water leaking or ponding near any electrical device
- Any condition that poses a serious risk of electrocution or fire and poses an immediate life-threatening condition.
- Absence of a working heating system when outside temperature is below 60 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Utilities not in service, including no running hot water
- Conditions that present the imminent possibility of injury
- Obstacles that prevent safe entrance or exit from the unit
 - Any components that affect the function of the fire escape are missing or damaged
 - Stored items or other barriers restrict or prevent the use of the fire escape in the event of an emergency
 - The building's emergency exit is blocked or impeded, thus limiting the ability of occupants to exit in a fire or other emergency
- Absence of a functioning toilet in the unit
- Non-Operational Refrigerator/Freezer
- Missing or inoperable smoke detectors
- Missing or inoperable carbon monoxide detector
- Missing, damaged, discharged, overcharged, or expired fire extinguisher (where required)
- Gas/oil-fired water heater or heating, ventilation, or cooling system with missing, damaged, improper, or misaligned chimney venting
 - The chimney or venting system on a fuel-fired water heater is misaligned, negatively pitched, or damaged, which may cause improper or dangerous venting or gases
 - A gas dryer vent is missing, damaged, or is visually determined to be inoperable, or the dryer exhaust is not vented to the outside
 - A fuel-fired space heater is not properly vented or lacks available combustion air
 - A non-vented space heater is present
 - Safety devices on a fuel-fired space heater are missing or damaged
 - The chimney or venting system on a fuel-fired heating, ventilation, or cooling system is misaligned, negatively pitched, or damaged, which may cause improper or dangerous venting of gas
- Deteriorating paint as defined at 24 CFR 35.110 in a unit built before 1978 that is to be occupied by a family with a child under six years of age if it would prevent the family from moving into the unit
- Open sewage in the unit
- Severely broken windowpanes that are within the reach of family members

If an owner fails to correct life-threatening conditions as required by OHCD, OHCD will enforce the HQS in accordance with HUD requirements. See 8-II-G.

If a family fails to correct a family caused life threatening condition as required by OHCD, OHCD will enforce the family obligations. See 8-II.H.

Chapter 8.A.

The owner will be required to repair an inoperable smoke detector and/or carbon monoxide detectors unless OHCD determines that the family has intentionally disconnected it (by removing batteries or other means). In this case, the family will be required to repair the smoke detector and/or carbon monoxide detectors within 24 hours.

8-I.D. OWNER AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES [24 CFR 982.404]

Owner Obligation

The owner must maintain the unit in accordance with housing quality standards. A unit is not in compliance with housing quality standards if the PHA or other inspector authorized by the state or local government determines that the unit has housing quality standards deficiencies based upon an inspection, notifies the owner in writing of the deficiencies, and the deficiencies are not remedied within the appropriate time frame.

In the case of a housing quality standards deficiency that the PHA determines is caused by the tenant, any member of the household, or any guest or other person under the tenant's control (other than damage resulting from ordinary use), the PHA may waive the owner's responsibility to remedy the violation. The HAP to the owner may not be withheld or abated if the owner responsibility has been waived. However, if the family's actions constitute a serious or repeated lease violation, the owner may take legal action to evict the family. In addition, the PHA may terminate the family's assistance because of a housing quality standards breach (beyond damage resulting from ordinary use) caused by any member of the household, guest, or other person under the tenant's control.

OHCD Policy

OHCD will waive the owner's responsibility for housing quality standards deficiencies that have been determined to have been caused by the tenant, any member of the household, or any guest or other person under the tenant's control, to the extent the tenant can be held responsible for ensuring that the deficiencies are corrected: the tenant must take all necessary steps permissible under the lease and state and local law to remedy the deficiency. This may include paying the owner for the cost of the necessary repairs in accordance with the lease.

Family Responsibilities

The family may be held responsible for a breach of housing quality standards caused by any of the following:

- Tenant-paid utilities not in service;
- Failure to provide or maintain appliances owned by the family; and
- Damage to the dwelling unit or premises caused by a household member or guest beyond ordinary wear and tear.

OHCD Policy

Damages beyond ordinary wear and tear will be considered to be damages which could be assessed against the security deposit under state law or in court practice.

If the PHA has waived the owner's responsibility to remedy the violation as outlined under the owner obligations above, the following applies:

Chapter 8.A.

- If the housing quality standards breach caused by the family is life-threatening, the family must take all steps permissible under the lease and state and local law to ensure the deficiency is corrected within 24 hours of notification.
- For other family-caused deficiencies, the family must take all steps permissible under the lease and state and local law to ensure the deficiency is corrected within 30 calendar days of notification (or any PHA-approved extension).

If the family has caused a breach of the HQS, the PHA must take prompt and vigorous action to enforce the family obligations. The PHA may terminate assistance for the family in accordance with 24 CFR 982.552.

8-I.E. SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR CHILDREN WITH ELEVATED BLOOD-LEAD LEVEL (EBLL) [24 CFR 35.1225; FR Notice 1/13/17, Notice PIH 2017-13]

If the PHA is notified by a public health department or other medical health care provider, or verifies information from a source other than a public health department or medical health care provider, that a child of less than six (6) years of age, living in an HCV-assisted unit has been identified as having an elevated blood lead level, the PHA must complete an environmental investigation of the dwelling unit within 15 calendar days after being notified by a public health department or other medical health care provider. The environmental investigation must be completed in accordance with program requirements, and the result of the environmental investigation must be immediately provided to the owner of the dwelling unit. In cases where the public health department has already completed an evaluation of the unit, this information must be provided to the owner.

Within 30 days after receiving the environmental investigation report from the PHA, or the evaluation from the public health department, the owner is required to complete the reduction of identified lead-based paint hazards in accordance with the lead-based paint regulations [24 CFR 35.1325 and 35.1330, 40 CFR 745.227]. If the owner does not complete the “hazard reduction” as required, the dwelling unit is in violation of HQS and the PHA will take action in accordance with Section 8-II.G.

PHA reporting requirements, and data collection and record keeping responsibilities related to children with an elevated blood lead level are discussed in Chapter 16.

8-I.F. VIOLATION OF HQS SPACE STANDARDS [24 CFR 982.401, 24 CFR 982.403]

A dwelling unit must:

- Provide adequate space and security for the family
- Have at least one bedroom or living/sleeping room for each two persons

A unit that does not meet these HQS space standards is defined as *overcrowded*.

A living room may be used as sleeping (bedroom) space, but no more than two persons may occupy the space [HCV GB p. 10-6]. A bedroom or living/sleeping room must have at least:

Chapter 8.A.

- One window
- Two electrical outlets in proper operating condition (permanent overhead or wall-mounted light fixtures may count as one of the required electrical outlets).

If the PHA determines that a unit is overcrowded because of an increase in family size or a change in family composition, the PHA must issue the family a new voucher, and the family and the PHA must try to find an acceptable unit as soon as possible. If an acceptable unit is available for rental by the family, the PHA must terminate the HAP contract in accordance with its terms.

Chapter 8.A.

Chapter 8.A.

PART II: THE INSPECTION PROCESS

8-II.A. OVERVIEW [24 CFR 982.405]

Types of Inspections

The PHA conducts the following types of inspections as needed. Each type of inspection is discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

- *Initial Inspections.* The PHA conducts initial inspections in response to a request from the family to approve a unit for participation in the HCV program. The unit must pass the HQS inspection on or before the effective date of the HAP Contract.
- *Periodic Inspections.* HUD requires the PHA to inspect each unit under lease at least annually or biennially, depending on PHA policy, to confirm that the unit still meets HQS. The inspection may be conducted in conjunction with the family's annual reexamination but also may be conducted separately.
- *Interim Inspections.* A special inspection may be requested by the owner, the family, or a third party as a result of problems identified with a unit between annual inspections.
- *Supervisory Quality Control Inspections.* HUD requires that a sample of units be inspected by a supervisor or other qualified individual to evaluate the work of the inspector(s) and to ensure that inspections are performed in compliance with the HQS.

Inspection Costs [Notice PIH 2016-05; 24 CFR 5.705(b)]

The PHA may not charge the family for unit inspections or re-inspections [24 CFR 982.405(e)].

The PHA may not charge the owner for the inspection of the unit prior to the initial term of the lease or for a first inspection during assisted occupancy of the unit. However, the PHA may charge a reasonable fee to owners for re-inspections if the owner notifies the PHA that a repair has been made or the allotted time for repairs has elapsed and a reinspection reveals that any deficiency cited in the previous inspection that the owner is responsible for repairing, pursuant to 24 CFR 982404(a), was not corrected. Fees may not be imposed for tenant-caused damages, for cases in which the inspector could not gain access to the unit, or for new deficiencies discovered during a reinspection.

The owner may not pass the cost of a reinspection fee to the family. Reinspection fees must be added to the PHA's administrative fee reserves and may only be used for activities related to the provision of tenant-based assistance.

OHCD Policy

OHCD will not charge a fee for failed re-inspections.

Remote-Video Inspections (RVIs) [Notice PIH 2020-31]

As an alternative to some or all on-site inspections, the PHA may, but is not required to, perform HQS inspections from a remote location using video streaming technology and a proxy at the inspection site. Since there may be some circumstances in which the application of technology provides insufficient information or evidence to allow the PHA to make appropriate determinations about whether a condition violates HQS, Notice PIH 2020-31 requires that if a

Chapter 8.A.

PHA chooses to implement RVIs, the PHA should have policies and procedures in place to address such limitations.

OHCD Policy

The OHCD will not conduct any HQS inspection using RVI.

Notice and Scheduling

The family must allow the PHA to inspect the unit at reasonable times with reasonable notice. [24 CFR 982.551(d)].

OHCD Policy

Both the family and the owner will be given reasonable notice of all inspections. Except in the case of a life-threatening emergency, reasonable notice is considered to be not less than 48 hours. Inspections may be scheduled between 8:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Generally, inspections will be conducted on business days only. In the case of a life-threatening emergency, OHCD will give as much notice as possible, given the nature of the emergency.

Owner and Family Inspection Attendance

HUD permits the PHA to set policy regarding family and owner presence at the time of inspection [HCV GB p. 10-27].

OHCD Policy

When a family occupies the unit at the time of inspection, an authorized adult must be present for the inspection. The presence of the owner or the owner's representative is encouraged but is not required.

At initial inspection of a vacant unit, OHCD will inspect the unit in the presence of the owner, or owner's representative. If the owner is not available for the inspection or a representative, the owner can grant permission for OHCD to inspect the unit by providing the "lock box" key code. The presence of a family representative is permitted but is not required.

8-II.B. INITIAL HQS INSPECTION [24 CFR 982.405(a)]

HUD regulations require that units assisted under the HCV program be inspected to determine that the units meet housing quality standards before the PHA approves assisted tenancy. However, PHAs have two options for bringing units under HAP contract (or, in the case of PBV, approving occupancy and the execution of a lease) more quickly. The PHA may but is not required to approve assisted tenancy and start HAP if the unit:

- Fails the initial inspection, but only if no life-threatening deficiencies are identified; and/or
- Passed an alternative inspection in the last 24 months.

Chapter 8.A.

If the PHA adopts the alternative inspection option in combination with the non-life-threatening deficiencies option, the PHA must follow family and owner notification requirements listed at 24 CFR 982.406(f). Otherwise, if neither of the above provisions are adopted, the PHA must determine that the unit the family selects meets NSPIRE standards prior to approving tenancy.

Approving Units with Non-Life-Threatening Deficiencies [FR Notice 1/18/17; Notice PIH 2017-20; FR Notice 5/7/24; and 24 CFR 982.405(j)]

The PHA may approve assisted tenancy, execute a HAP contract, and begin paying HAP if a unit fails an initial inspection, but only if the deficiencies identified are non-life threatening. This is known as the “NLT option.” A PHA that implements the NLT option may apply the option to all of the PHA’s initial inspections or may limit it to certain units. If the NLT option is adopted, the PHA must follow requirements listed at 24 CFR 982.405(j) for family and owner notification.

The PHA’s administrative plan must specify the circumstances under which the PHA will exercise the NLT option, if any.

OHCD Policy

OHCD will not use the NLT option. All units must pass the initial inspection on or before the effective date of the HAP contract.

Approving Units Using Alternative Inspections [FR Notice 1/18/17; Notice PIH 2017-20; FR Notice 5/7/24; and 24 CFR 982.406]

The PHA may approve assisted tenancy, execute a HAP contract, and begin paying HAP if a unit passed an alternative inspection (i.e., an inspection conducted for another housing program) conducted in the last 24 months provided the PHA is able to obtain the results of the alternative inspection, the property received a “pass” score (if applicable), and the inspection meets the requirements at 24 CFR 982.406(c) and (d). The PHA may implement the use of alternative inspections for both initial and periodic inspections or may limit the use of alternative inspections to either initial or periodic inspections. If alternative inspections are used, the PHA must follow requirements listed at 24 CFR 982.406(e)(2) for family and owner notification.

A PHA relying on an alternative inspections must identify the alternative inspection method being used in the PHA’s administrative plan.

OHCD Policy

The unit must pass the initial inspection on or before the effective date of the HAP contract.

The PHA will not rely on alternative inspections and will conduct an initial inspection for each unit prior to executing a HAP contract with the owner.

Timing of Initial Inspections [24 CFR 982.305(b)(2)(i)]

Unless the PHA relies on alternative inspections, HUD requires PHAs with fewer than 1,250 budgeted units to complete the initial inspection, determine whether the unit satisfies HQS, and notify the owner and the family of the determination within 15 days of submission of the Request for Tenancy Approval (RTA). For PHAs with 1,250 or more budgeted units, to the extent practicable such inspection and determination must be completed within 15 days. The 15-day

Chapter 8.A.

period is suspended for any period during which the unit is not available for inspection [982.305(b)(2)].

OHCD Policy

OHCD will complete the initial inspection, determine whether the unit satisfies HQS, and notify the owner and the family of the determination within 15 days of submission of the Request for Tenancy Approval (RTA).

Inspection Results and Re-inspections

OHCD Policy

If any HQS violations are identified, the owner will be notified of the deficiencies and be given a time frame to correct them. If requested by the owner, the time frame for correcting the deficiencies may be extended by OHCD for good cause. OHCD will re-inspect the unit within five business days of the date the owner notifies OHCD that the required corrections have been made.

If the time period for correcting the deficiencies (or any OHCD-approved extension) has elapsed, or the unit fails HQS at the time of the re-inspection, OHCD will notify the owner and the family that the unit has been rejected and that the family must search for another unit. OHCD may agree to conduct a second re-inspection, for good cause, at the request of the family and owner.

Following a failed re-inspection, the family may submit a new Request for Tenancy Approval (HUD 52517) after the owner has made repairs if they are unable to locate another suitable unit.

Utilities

Generally, at initial lease-up the owner is responsible for demonstrating that all utilities are in working order including those utilities that the family will be responsible for paying.

OHCD Policy

All utilities must be in service for testing at the time of the initial inspection. If utilities are not in service at the time of initial inspection, the OHCD inspector must re-inspect the unit to confirm that utilities are operational before the HAP contract is executed by OHCD.

Appliances [Form HUD-52580]

OHCD Policy

If the family is responsible for supplying the stove and/or refrigerator, OHCD will allow the stove and refrigerator to be placed in the unit after the unit has met all other HQS requirements. The required appliances must be in place before the HAP contract is executed by OHCD. OHCD will execute the HAP contract based upon a certification from the family that the appliances have been installed and are working. A confirmatory inspection will be scheduled within 30 days of HAP contract approval.

Chapter 8.A.

8-II.C. PERIODIC HQS INSPECTIONS [24 CFR 982.405(b) and Notice PIH 2016-05]

OHCD Policy

Each unit under HAP contract must be inspected biennially within 24 months of the last full HQS inspection. The OHCD reserves the right to require annual inspections of any unit or owner at any time.

The PHA will not rely on alternative inspection standards.

Scheduling the Inspection

OHCD Policy

If an adult cannot be present on the scheduled date, the family should request that OHCD reschedule the inspection. OHCD and family will agree on a new inspection date that generally should take place within five (5) business days of the originally scheduled date. OHCD may schedule an inspection more than five (5) business days after the original date for good cause.

If the family misses the first scheduled appointment without requesting a new inspection date, OHCD will automatically schedule a second inspection. If the family misses two scheduled inspections without OHCD approval, OHCD will consider the family to have violated its obligation to make the unit available for inspection. This may result in termination of the family's assistance in accordance with Chapter 12.

8-II.D. INTERIM INSPECTIONS [24 CFR 982.405(d)]

If a participant or government official notifies the PHA of a potential deficiency, the following applies:

- If the reported deficiency is life-threatening, the PHA must, within 24 hours of notification, both inspect the housing unit and notify the owner if the life-threatening deficiency is confirmed. The owner must then make the repairs within 24 hours of PHA notification.
- If the reported deficiency is non-life-threatening, the PHA must, within 15 days of notification, both inspect the unit and notify the owner if the deficiency is confirmed. The owner must then make the repairs within 30 days of notification from the PHA or within any PHA-approved extension

OHCD Policy

During an interim inspection, OHCD generally will inspect only those deficiencies that were reported. However, the inspector will record any additional HQS deficiencies that are observed and will require the responsible party to make the necessary repairs.

If the periodic inspection has been scheduled or is due within 90 days of the date the interim inspection is scheduled, OHCD may elect to conduct a full inspection.

Chapter 8.A.

8-II.E. SUPERVISORY QUALITY CONTROL INSPECTIONS [24 CFR 982.405(b); 24 CFR 985.3e); HCV GB, p. 10-32]

HUD requires a PHA supervisor or other qualified person to conduct quality control inspections of a sample of units to ensure that each inspector is conducting accurate and complete inspections and that there is consistency in the application of the HQS.

The unit sample must include only units that have been inspected within the preceding three months. The selected sample should be drawn to represent a cross section of neighborhoods and the work of a cross section of inspectors.

OHCD Policy

The minimum number of annual-required quality control inspections is calculated based on OHCD's total baseline voucher count, which is calculated using the following methodology.

Total Baseline Voucher Count	Minimum Number of Files or Records to be Sampled
50 or less	5
51-600	5 plus 1 for each 50 (or part of 50) over 50
601-2,000	16 plus 1 for each 100 (or part of 100) over 600
Over 2,000	30 plus 1 for each 200 (or part of 200) over 2,000

Based on OHCD's baseline voucher count, the number of annual quality control inspections will be calculated using the over 601-2,000 baseline voucher count formula [HCV GB, p. 10-32].

8-II.F. INSPECTION RESULTS AND RE-INSPECTIONS FOR UNITS UNDER HAP CONTRACT

Notification of Corrective Actions [24 CFR 982.404(d)(1)]

The owner must maintain the unit in accordance with housing quality standards. The unit is in noncompliance with housing quality standards if:

- The PHA or authorized inspector determines the unit has housing quality standards deficiencies based upon an inspection
- The PHA notified the owner in writing of the unit housing quality standards deficiencies; and
- The unit's housing quality standards deficiencies are not corrected within the required timeframes.

Chapter 8.A.

A PHA may withhold assistance payments for units that have deficiencies once the owner has been notified in writing of the deficiencies. The PHA's administrative plan must identify the conditions under which the PHA will withhold HAP. In this case, if the unit is brought into compliance during the applicable cure period, the PHA must resume assistance payments and provide payments to cover the time period for which the payments were withheld.

The PHA must abate the HAP, including amounts that had been withheld, if the owner fails to make the repairs within the applicable cure period. In this case, the PHA must notify the family and the owner that it is abating payments and, if the unit does not meet housing quality standards within 60 days (or a reasonable longer period established by the PHA), the PHA will terminate the HAP contract for the unit and the family will have to move to receive continued assistance. In this case, the PHA must issue the family its voucher to move at least 30 days prior to the termination of the HAP contract.

OHCD Policy

The owner and the family will be notified in writing of the results of all inspections. When an inspection identifies housing quality standards failures, OHCD will determine (1) whether or not the failure is a life-threatening condition and (2) whether the family or owner is responsible.

OHCD will not withhold assistance payments upon notification of the deficiencies to the owner.

When life-threatening conditions are identified, OHCD will immediately notify both parties by telephone or email. The notice will specify who is responsible for correcting the violation. The corrective actions must be taken within 24 hours of the PHA's notice.

When failures that are not life-threatening are identified, OHCD will send the owner and the family a written notification of the inspection results within five business days of the inspection. The written notice will specify who is responsible for correcting the violation, and the time frame within which the failure must be corrected. Generally, not more than 30 days will be allowed for the correction.

If the owner is responsible for correcting the deficiency, the notice of inspection results will inform the owner that if life-threatening conditions are not corrected within 24 hours, and non-life-threatening conditions are not corrected within the specified time frame (or any OHCD-approved extension), the owner's HAP will be abated in accordance with OHCD policy (see 8-II.G.).

Likewise, if the family is responsible for correcting the deficiency, the notice will inform the family that if corrections are not made within the specified time frame (or any OHCD-approved extension, if applicable) the family's assistance will be terminated in accordance with OHCD policy (see Chapter 12).

Extensions

For conditions that are life-threatening, the PHA cannot grant an extension to the 24-hour corrective action period. For conditions that are not life-threatening, the PHA may grant an exception to the required time frames for correcting the violation, if the PHA determines that an extension is appropriate [24 CFR 982.404].

Chapter 8.A.

OHCD Policy

Extensions will be granted in cases where OHCD has determined that the owner has made a good faith effort to correct the deficiencies and is unable to for reasons beyond the owner's control. Reasons may include, but are not limited to:

- A repair cannot be completed because required parts or services are not available.
- A repair cannot be completed because of weather conditions.
- A reasonable accommodation is needed because the family includes a person with disabilities.

The length of the extension will be determined on a case-by-case basis, but will not exceed 60 days, except in the case of delays caused by weather conditions. In the case of weather conditions, extensions may be continued until the weather has improved sufficiently to make repairs possible. The necessary repairs must be made within 15 calendar days once the weather conditions have subsided. (NOTE: Generally, for winter delays, repairs must be completed no later than June 15th.)

Re-inspections [24 CFR 982.450(i)]

When a PHA must verify correction of a deficiency, the PHA may use verification methods other than another on-site inspection. The PHA may establish different verification methods for initial and non-initial inspections or for different deficiencies. Upon either an inspection for initial occupancy or a reinspection, the PHA may accept photographic evidence or other reliable evidence from the owner to verify that a deficiency has been corrected.

OHCD Policy

OHCD will conduct a re-inspection by the end of the corrective period, or any OHCD approved extension.

The family and owner will be given reasonable notice of the reinspection appointment. If the deficiencies have not been corrected by the time of the reinspection, OHCD will send a notice of abatement to the owner, or in the case of family caused violations, a notice of termination to the family, in accordance with OHCD policies. If OHCD is unable to gain entry to the unit in order to conduct the rescheduled inspection, OHCD will consider the family to have violated its obligation to make the unit available for reinspection. This may result in termination of the family's assistance in accordance with Chapter 12.

OHCD will not accept self-certification of HQS repairs.

8-II.G. ENFORCING OWNER COMPLIANCE

If the owner fails to maintain the dwelling unit in accordance with HQS, the PHA must take prompt and vigorous action to enforce the owner's obligations.

Chapter 8.A.

HAP Withholding [24 CFR 982.404(d)(1)]

A PHA may withhold assistance payments for units that have housing quality standards deficiencies once the PHA has notified the owner in writing of the deficiencies. The PHA's administrative plan must identify the conditions under which the PHA will withhold HAP. In this case, if the unit is brought into compliance during the applicable cure period, the PHA resumes assistance payments and provides assistance payments to cover the time period for which the payments were withheld.

OHCD Policy

The OHCD will not withhold assistance payments upon notification to the owner of the deficiencies.

HAP Abatement

If an owner fails to correct HQS deficiencies by the time specified by the PHA, HUD requires the PHA to abate housing assistance payments no later than the first of the month following the specified correction period (including any approved extension) [24 CFR 985.3(f)]. No retroactive payments will be made to the owner for the period of time the rent was abated. Owner rents are not abated as a result of HQS failures that are the family's responsibility.

OHCD Policy

OHCD will make all HAP abatements effective the first of the month following the expiration of OHCD specified correction period (including any extension).

OHCD will inspect abated units within five (5) business days of the owner's notification that the work has been completed. Payment will resume effective on the day the unit passes inspection.

During any abatement period the family continues to be responsible for its share of the rent.

For PHA policies on family moves when units are in abatement and termination of the HAP contract when a family moves due to deficiencies, see Section 10-I.B.

HAP Contract Termination

The PHA must decide how long any abatement period will continue before the HAP contract will be terminated. The PHA should not terminate the contract until the family finds another unit, provided the family does so in a reasonable time [HCV GB p. 10-29] and must give the owner reasonable notice of the termination. The PHA will issue a voucher to permit the family to move to another unit as described in Chapter 10.

OHCD Policy

The maximum length of time that HAP may be abated is 60 calendar days from the abatement effective date, which starts on the first of the month following the first failed reinspection. However, if the owner/agent completes corrections and notifies the PHA before the 60-day termination of the HAP contract, OHCD may rescind the termination notice if (1) the family still resides in the unit and wishes to remain in the unit and (2) the unit passes inspection.

Reasonable notice of HAP contract termination by the PHA is 30 days. The PHA will issue a voucher to permit the family to move to another unit as described in Chapter 10.

Chapter 8.A.

8-II.H. ENFORCING FAMILY COMPLIANCE WITH HQS [24 CFR 982.404(b)]

If the PHA waived the landlord responsibility for housing quality standards deficiencies that have been determined to have been caused by the tenant, any member of the household, or any guest or other person under the tenant's control (see section 8-I.D), the family is responsible for correcting any housing quality standards violations listed in paragraph 8.I.D. If the family fails to correct a violation within the period allowed by the PHA (and any extensions), the PHA will terminate the family's assistance, according to the policies described in Chapter 12.

If the owner carries out a repair for which the family is responsible under the lease, the owner may bill the family for the cost of the repair and may enter into a repayment agreement with the family.

Chapter 8.A.

PART III: RENT REASONABLENESS [24 CFR 982.507]

8-III.A. OVERVIEW

Except in the case of certain LIHTC- and HOME-assisted units, no HAP contract can be approved until the PHA has determined that the rent for the unit is reasonable. The purpose of the rent reasonableness test is to ensure that a fair rent is paid for each unit rented under the HCV program.

HUD regulations define a reasonable rent as one that does not exceed the rent charged for comparable, unassisted units in the same market area. HUD also requires that owners not charge more for assisted units than for comparable units on the premises. This part explains the method used to determine whether a unit's rent is reasonable.

8-III.B. WHEN RENT REASONABLENESS DETERMINATIONS ARE REQUIRED

Owner-Initiated Rent Determinations

The PHA must make a rent reasonableness determination at initial occupancy and whenever the owner requests a rent adjustment.

The owner and family first negotiate the rent for a unit. The PHA will assist the family with the negotiations upon request. At initial occupancy the PHA must determine whether the proposed rent is reasonable before a HAP Contract is signed. The owner must not change the rent during the initial lease term. Subsequent requests for rent adjustments must be consistent with the lease between the owner and the family. Rent increases will not be approved unless any failed items identified by the most recent HQS inspection have been corrected.

OHCD Policy

For rent reasonableness, property evaluations are based upon the number of bedrooms, baths and square footage on the County Assessment. If the owner has made alterations to the property such as finishing a basement or adding an additional bath and permits were pulled, then the additional bedrooms and baths should reflect on County Assessment. If not then the owner must provide a copy of the required building permit(s) along with the final inspections through Prince William County Planning Division which identifies and includes additional bedroom(s), bathroom(s) and/or finished living area then the additional rooms as identified and approved will be considered when evaluating rent reasonableness. (Clarification March 30, 2023)

After the initial occupancy period, the owner may request a rent adjustment in accordance with the owner's lease. For rent increase requests after initial lease-up, OHCD may request owners to provide information about the rents charged for other units on the premises, if the premises include more than 4 units. In evaluating the proposed rents in comparison to other units on the premises OHCD will consider unit size and length of tenancy in the other units.

Chapter 8.A.

All rent adjustments will be effective the first of the month following 60 days after the PHA's receipt of the owner's request or on the date specified by the owner, whichever is later. **The annual adjustment cannot exceed 5% of the contract rent.**

PHA and HUD-Initiated Rent Reasonableness Determinations

HUD requires the PHA to make a determination of rent reasonableness (even if the owner has not requested a change) if there is a 10 percent decrease in the Fair Market Rent that goes into effect at least 60 days before the contract anniversary date. HUD also may direct the PHA to make a determination at any other time. The PHA may decide that a new determination of rent reasonableness is needed at any time.

OHCD Policy

In addition to the instances described above, OHCD will make a determination of rent reasonableness at any time after the initial occupancy period if: (1) OHCD determines that the initial rent reasonableness determination was in error or (2) OHCD determines that the information provided by the owner about the unit or other units on the same premises was incorrect.

LIHTC- and HOME-Assisted Units [24 CFR 982.507(c)]

For units receiving low-income housing tax credits (LIHTCs) or units assisted under HUD's HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) Program, a rent comparison with unassisted units is not required if the voucher rent does not exceed the rent for other LIHTC- or HOME-assisted units in the project that are not occupied by families with tenant-based assistance. For LIHTCs, if the rent requested by the owner does exceed the LIHTC rents for non-voucher families, the PHA must perform a rent comparability study in accordance with program regulations. In such cases, the rent shall not exceed the lesser of: (1) the reasonable rent as determined from the rent comparability study; or (2) the payment standard established by the PHA for the unit size involved.

8-III.C. HOW COMPARABILITY IS ESTABLISHED

Factors to Consider

HUD requires the PHA to take into consideration the factors listed below when determining rent comparability. The PHA may use these factors to make upward or downward adjustments to the rents of comparison units when the units are not identical to the HCV-assisted unit.

- Location and age
- Unit size including the number of rooms and square footage of rooms
- The type of unit including construction type (e.g., single family, duplex, garden, low-rise, high-rise)
- The quality of the units including the quality of the original construction, maintenance and improvements made.
- Amenities, services, and utilities included in the rent.

Chapter 8.A.

Units that Must Not be Used as Comparable

Comparable units must represent unrestricted market rents. Therefore, units that receive some form of federal, state, or local assistance that imposes rent restrictions cannot be considered comparable units. These include units assisted by HUD through any of the following programs: Section 8 project-based assistance, Section 236 and Section 221(d)(3) Below Market Interest Rate (BMIR) projects, HOME or Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program-assisted units in which the rents are subsidized; units subsidized through federal, state, or local tax credits; units subsidized by the Department of Agriculture rural housing programs, and units that are rent controlled by local ordinance [Notice PIH 2002-22, Notice PIH 2005-20 and Notice PIH 2020-19].

Note: PIH Notice 2020-19 issued August 21, 2020, provides further guidance on the issue of what constitutes an assisted unit.

Rents Charged for Other Units on the Premises

The Request for Tenancy Approval (HUD-52517) requires owners to provide information, on the form itself, about the rent charged for other unassisted comparable units on the premises if the premises include more than 4 units.

By accepting the PHA payment each month the owner certifies that the rent is not more than the rent charged for comparable unassisted units on the premises. If asked to do so, the owner must give the PHA information regarding rents charged for other units on the premises.

8-III.D. PHA RENT REASONABLENESS METHODOLOGY

How Market Data Is Collected

OHCD Policy

OHCD will collect and maintain data on market rents in OHCD's jurisdiction. Information sources include MRIS, realtors, market surveys, inquiries of owners and other available sources. The data will be maintained by bedroom size and market areas. Market areas may be defined by zip codes, census tract, neighborhood, and identifiable natural or man-made boundaries. The data will be updated on an ongoing basis and rent information that is more than 12 months old will be eliminated from the database.

How Rents Are Determined

OHCD Policy

The rent for a unit proposed for HCV assistance will be compared to the rent charged for comparable units in the same market area. **The OHCD will develop a range of prices for comparable units by bedroom size within defined market areas. Units proposed for HCV assistance will be compared to the units within this rent range. Because units may be similar, but not exactly like the unit proposed for HCV assistance, the OHCD may make adjustments to the range of prices to account for these differences..**

Chapter 8.A.

The adjustment must reflect the local market. Not all differences in units require adjustments (e.g., the presence or absence of a garbage disposal may not affect the rent in some market areas).

Adjustments may vary by unit type (e.g., a second bathroom may be more valuable in a three-bedroom unit than in a two-bedroom).

In comparing rents, OHCD will take into account critical market factors that impact rent, including the location, quality, size, unit type and age of the contract unit, as well as any amenities, housing services, maintenance and utilities to be provided by the owner in accordance with the lease.

The adjustment must reflect the rental value of the difference – not its construction costs (e.g., it might cost \$20,000 to put on a new roof, but the new room might not make any difference in what a tenant would be willing to pay because rental units are presumed to have a functioning roof).

When a comparable project offers rent concessions (e.g., first month rent free or reduced rent) the concession is allocated over a 12-months and subtracted from the monthly rent to arrive at a true base rent. For example, if a comparable project reports rent of \$500/month, but new tenants receive the first month's rent free, the actual rent for the unit would be calculate as follows: $\$500 - (\$500/12) =$ actual monthly rent of \$458.

The OHCD will notify the owner of the rent OHCD can approve based upon its analysis of rents for comparable units. The owner may submit information about other comparable units in the market area. OHCD will confirm the accuracy of the information provided and consider this additional information when making rent determinations. The owner must submit any additional information within 5 business days of the OHCD's request for information or the owner's request to submit information.

Chapter 8.A.

EXHIBIT 8-1: OVERVIEW OF HUD HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS

Note: This document provides an overview of HQS. For more detailed information see the following documents:

- 24 CFR 982.401, Housing Quality Standards (HQS)
- Housing Choice Voucher Guidebook, Chapter 10.
- HUD Housing Inspection Manual for Section 8 Housing
- HUD Inspection Form, form HUD-52580 (3/01) and Inspection Checklist, form HUD-52580-A (9/00)

Sanitary Facilities

The dwelling unit must include sanitary facilities within the unit. The sanitary facilities must be usable in privacy and must be in proper operating condition and adequate for personal cleanliness and disposal of human waste.

Acceptability Criteria •

- The bathroom must be located in a separate room and have a flush toilet in proper operating condition.
- The unit must have a fixed basin (lavatory) with a sink trap and hot and cold running water in proper operating condition.
- The unit must have a shower or tub with hot and cold running water in proper operating condition.
- The facilities must utilize an approved public or private disposal system, including a locally approved septic system. The bathroom must be contained within the dwelling unit, afford privacy (usually meaning a door, although no lock is required), and be for the exclusive use of the occupants. All public or private waste disposal systems servicing the unit or facilities must be either state or local agency approved. The tub/shower, toilet, and basin/lavatory must have a proper sewer trap, drain, and vents to prevent the escape of sewer gases or severe leakage of water. Drains must not be clogged, and the toilet must flush. Hot and cold water must be available at the tub, shower, and lavatory taps. The definition of hot water (temperature) required at the lavatory, tub, or shower should be determined from local health standards or applicable local code

Food Preparation and Refuse Disposal

The dwelling unit must have space and equipment suitable for the family to store, prepare, and serve food in a sanitary manner.

Acceptable Criteria

- The dwelling unit must have an oven and a stove or range. A microwave oven may be substituted for a tenant-supplied oven and stove or range. A microwave may be substituted for an owner-supplied oven and stove or range if the tenant agrees and microwave ovens are furnished to both subsidized and unsubsidized tenants in the same building or premises.
- The dwelling unit must have a refrigerator of appropriate size for the family.

Chapter 8.A.

- All required equipment must be in proper operating condition. According to the lease, equipment may be supplied by either the owner or the family.
- The dwelling unit must have a kitchen sink in proper operating condition, with a sink trap and hot and cold running water. The sink must drain into an approved public or private system.
- The dwelling unit must have space for storage, preparation, and serving of food.
- Facilities and services for the sanitary disposal of food waste and refuse, including temporary storage facilities where necessary, are required.

Hot plates are not acceptable substitutes for stoves or ranges. The oven must heat and all burners on the stove or range must work. All stove or range knobs must be present. The stove or range must be free of hazardous gas hook-ups, gas leaks, or electrical hazards.

The refrigerator must be of adequate size for the family and capable of maintaining a temperature low enough to keep food from spoiling (Above 32° F, but generally below 40° F).

The sink must have hot and cold running water from the faucets and a proper working sink drain with gas trap. It must also be hooked to an approved water and sewer system. The definition of hot water should be determined by the local health department or applicable local code.

Space for storage, preparation, and serving of food must be present. Built-in space, equipment, table(s), or portable storage facilities are acceptable. Waste and refuse storage facilities are determined by local practice and may include trash cans or dumpster facilities.

Space and Security

The dwelling unit must provide adequate space and security for the family. This includes having at least one bedroom or living/sleeping room for each two persons. All doors and windows must lock.

Acceptability Criteria

- At a minimum, the dwelling unit must have a living room, a kitchen and a bathroom
- The dwelling unit must have at least one bedroom or living/sleeping room for every two persons.
- Dwelling unit windows that are accessible from the outside must be lockable.
- Exterior doors to the unit must be lockable.
- A living room may be used as sleeping (bedroom) space, but no more than two persons may occupy the space.
- Unit windows located on the first floor, at the basement level, on a fire escape, porch, or other outside space that can be reached from the ground and that are designed to be opened must have a locking device. (Windows with sills less than six feet off the ground are considered accessible.) Traditional window locks, those provided by storm/screen combination windows, window pins are acceptable. Windows leading to a fire escape or required to meet ventilation requirements may not be permanently nailed shut.
- Doors leading to the outside and common hallways, fire escapes, and porches or otherwise accessible from the ground must have locks. No specific type of lock is required.

Chapter 8.A.

- Window and door surfaces (including the door frame) must be in sufficient condition to support the installation and proper operation of window and door locks.

Thermal Environment

The unit must have a safe system for heating and cooling the dwelling unit. The dwelling unit must not contain unvented room heaters that burn gas, oil, or kerosene. Portable electric room heaters or kitchen stoves with built-in heating units are not acceptable as a primary source of heat for units located in climatic areas where permanent heat systems are required.

Acceptability Criteria

- There must be a safe system for heating the dwelling unit, such as electric baseboard, radiator, or forced air systems. In order to ensure a healthy living environment appropriate for the climate the system must be able to provide adequate heat either directly or indirectly to each room.
- If present, the air conditioning system or evaporative cooler, must safely provide adequate cooling to each room.
- The heating and/or air conditioning system must be in proper operating condition.
- The dwelling unit must not contain unvented room heaters that burn gas, oil, or kerosene.
- A heating system capable of maintaining an interior temperature of 65° between October 1 and May 1 is adequate. Adequate heat is required in all rooms used for living; the heat source does not have to be located in each room as long as the heat can pass to the appropriate space and meet the definition of adequate. Improper operating conditions, including all conditions that may be unsafe, such as broken or damaged source vents, flues, exhausts, gas or oil lines that create a potential fire hazard or threats to health and safety are not permitted. Heating unit safety devices must be present, and the heating equipment must have proper clearance from combustible materials and location of oil storage tanks. There must be proper gas and oil connections.

Illumination and Electricity

Each room must have adequate natural or artificial illumination to permit normal indoor activities and to support the health and safety of occupants. The dwelling unit must have sufficient electrical sources so occupants can use essential electrical appliances. Minimum standards are set for different types of rooms. Once the minimum standards are met, the number, type and location of electrical sources are a matter of tenant preference.

Acceptability Criteria

- There must be at least one window in both the living room and each sleeping room.
- The kitchen area and the bathroom must have a permanent ceiling or wall-mounted fixture in proper operating condition.
- The kitchen must have at least one electrical outlet in proper operating condition.
- The living room and each sleeping space must have at least two electrical outlets in proper operating condition. Permanent overhead or wall-mounted light fixtures may count as one of the required electrical outlets. OHCD must be satisfied that the electrical system is free of hazardous conditions, including exposed, uninsulated, or frayed wires, improper connections, improper insulation or grounding of any component of the system, overloading of capacity, or wires lying in or located near standing water or other unsafe places.
- Outlets must be properly installed in the baseboard, wall, or floor. Hanging light fixtures or outlets from electric wiring, missing cover plates on switches and outlets,

Chapter 8.A.

badly cracked outlets or cover plates, exposed fuse box connections and, overloaded circuits are unacceptable.

Structure and Materials

The dwelling unit must be structurally sound. Handrails are required when four or more steps (risers) are present, and protective railings are required when porches, balconies, and stoops are thirty inches or more off the ground. The elevator servicing the unit must be working [if there is one]. Manufactured homes must have proper tie-down devices capable of surviving wind loads common to the area.

Acceptability Criteria

- Ceilings, walls, and floors must not have any serious defects such as severe bulging or leaning, large holes, loose surface materials, severe buckling, missing parts, or other serious damage.
- The roof must be structurally sound and weather-proof.
- The foundation and exterior wall structure and surface must not have any serious defects such as serious leaning, buckling, sagging, large holes, or defects that may result in air infiltration or vermin infestation.
- The condition and equipment of interior and exterior stairs, halls, porches, and walkways must not present the danger of tripping and falling.
- Elevators must be working safely.

OHCD must examine each of the elements listed in the acceptability criteria to determine that each is structurally sound, will not collapse, and does not present a danger to residents through falling or missing parts, or tripping hazards. OHCD must determine that the unit is free from water, excessive air, and vermin infiltration.

Handrails are required when four or more steps (risers) are present, and protective railings are required when porches, balconies, and stoops are thirty inches off the ground.

The elevator servicing the unit must be working. A current county or state inspection certificate suffices to determine working condition of the elevator. Manufactured homes must have proper tie-down devices capable of surviving wind loads common to the area.

Interior Air Quality

The dwelling unit must be free of air pollutant levels that threaten the occupants' health. There must be adequate air circulation in the dwelling unit. Bathroom areas must have one openable window or other adequate ventilation. Any sleeping room must have at least one window. If a window was designed to be opened, it must be in proper working order.

Acceptability Criteria

- The dwelling unit must be free from dangerous air pollution levels from carbon monoxide, sewer gas, fuel gas, dust, and other harmful pollutants.
- There must be adequate air circulation in the dwelling unit.
- Bathroom areas must have one openable window or other adequate ventilation.
- Any sleeping room must have at least one window. If the window was designed to be opened, it must be in proper working order.

Chapter 8.A.

OHCD must be satisfied that air pollutants such as gas leaks, industrial outputs, and heavy traffic would not present a health hazard. Air circulation should be checked to determine adequate ventilation. Air conditioning (A/C) provides adequate circulation as do ceiling and vent fans.

The windows must adequately protect the unit's interior from the weather. Windows designed to open must not be painted or nailed shut. The ventilating bathroom fan in the bathroom must operate as intended.

Water Supply

The dwelling unit must be served by an approved public or private water supply that is sanitary and free from contamination. Plumbing fixtures and pipes must be free of leaks and threats to health and safety.

Acceptability Criteria

- The dwelling unit must be served by an approved public or private water supply that is sanitary and free from contamination. OHCD should be satisfied that the water supply is approved by the State or local jurisdiction.
- Clean water must be distributed to all unit fixtures and wastewater must leave the unit to an approved area without presence of sewer gas and backups.
- Plumbing fixtures and pipes must be free of leaks and threats to health and safety.
- Water-heating equipment must be installed safely and must not present any safety hazards to families. All water heaters must be free of leaks, have temperature/pressure relief valves, and a discharge line. Unless safety dividers or shields are installed water heaters must not be located in bedrooms or living areas where safety hazards may exist. Fuel burning equipment must have proper clearance from combustible materials and be properly vented.

Lead-Based Paint

Lead-based paint requirements apply to dwelling units built prior to 1978 that are occupied or can be occupied by families with children under six years of age, excluding zero-bedroom dwellings. Owners must:

- Disclose known lead-based paint hazards to prospective tenants before the lease is signed,
- Provide all prospective families with "Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home",
- Stabilize deteriorated painted surfaces and conduct hazard reduction activities when identified by the OHCD
- Notify tenants each time such an activity is performed
- Conduct all work in accordance with HUD safe practices
- As part of ongoing maintenance, ask each family to report deteriorated paint
- Maintain covered housing without deteriorated paint if there is a child under six in family.

For units occupied by elevated blood lead level (lead poisoned) children under six years of age, an environmental investigation must be conducted (paid for by the OHCD). If lead hazards are identified during the environmental investigation, the owner must complete hazard reduction activities **within 30 days**.

See HCV GB p. 10-15 for a detailed description of these requirements. For additional information on lead-based paint, requirements see 24 CFR 35, Subparts A, B, M, and R.

Chapter 8.A.

Acceptability Criteria

- The requirements apply to dwelling units built prior to 1978 that are occupied or can be occupied by families with children under six years of age, excluding zero-bedroom dwellings.
- During initial and annual inspections of pre-1978 units that are occupied or will be occupied by families with children under 6 years of age, the inspector must conduct a visual assessment for deteriorated paint surfaces and the owner must stabilize deteriorated surfaces. Applicable areas include painted surfaces within the dwelling unit, exterior painted surfaces associated with the dwelling unit, and common areas of the building through which residents must pass to gain access to the unit and areas frequented by resident children under six years of age, including play areas and childcare facilities.
- For units occupied by environmental intervention blood lead level (lead poisoned) children under six years of age, a risk assessment must be conducted (paid for by OHCD), and the owner must complete hazard reduction activities if lead hazards are identified during the risk assessment

Access

Use and maintenance of the unit must be possible without unauthorized use of other private properties. The building must provide an alternate means of exit in case of fire.

Acceptability Criteria

- The unit must have private access.
- In case of fire, the building must contain an alternate means of exit such as fire stairs, or windows, including use of a ladder for windows above the second floor. OHCD must determine that the unit has private access without unauthorized passage through another dwelling unit or private property.
- The emergency (alternate) exit from the building (not the unit) may consist of fire stairs, a second door, fire ladders, or exit through windows. The emergency exit must not be blocked. It must be appropriate for the family and considered adequate by local officials. Guidance from the local fire agency is advisable.

Site and Neighborhood

The site and neighborhood must be reasonably free from disturbing noises and reverberations, excessive trash or vermin, or other dangers to the health, safety, and general welfare of the occupants.

Acceptability Criteria

- The site and neighborhood may not be subject to serious adverse natural or manmade environmental conditions, such as dangerous walks or steps, instability, flooding, poor drainage, septic tank back-ups or sewer hazards, mudslides, abnormal air pollution, smoke or dust, excessive noise, vibration, or vehicular traffic, excessive accumulations of trash, vermin, or rodent infestation, or fire hazards.
- OHCD determines whether any of the above conditions seriously and continually affect the health or safety of the residents. PHAs should be careful not to restrict housing choice

Chapter 8.A.

in deciding acceptability. Failing a unit because the neighborhood is considered “bad” is not appropriate. Take into account whether private unassisted residents are living in the same neighborhood.

Sanitary Condition

The dwelling unit and its equipment must be in sanitary condition and free of vermin and rodent infestation. The unit must have adequate barriers to prevent infestation.

Acceptability Criteria

- The dwelling unit and its equipment must be free of vermin and rodent infestation.
- OHCD must ensure that the unit is free of rodents and heavy accumulations of trash, garbage, or other debris that may harbor vermin. Infestation by mice, roaches, or other vermin particular to the climate must also be considered. The unit must have adequate barriers to prevent infestation.

What is infestation of rodents or vermin? • By definition infestation means more than one bug or mouse. It is easily identified by observing mouse and/or rodent droppings or gnaw marks. If no visible evidence exists, there is probably no infestation. Based on the type of pest, OHCD must decide what the limits are for determining infestation and be consistent. Is one rat or roach too much?

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Smoke detectors must be installed in accordance with and meet the requirements of the National Fire Protection Association Standard (NFPA) 74 (or its successor standards). If the dwelling unit is occupied by any person with a hearing impairment, smoke detectors must have an appropriate alarm system as specified in NFPA 74 (or successor standards). **As of December 29, 2024, all smoke alarms must be either hard wired or sealed, 10-year battery devices.**

Carbon Monoxide detectors are a device that detects the presence of carbon monoxide (CO) gas in order to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. CO detectors are designed to measure CO levels over time and sound an alarm before dangerous levels of CO accumulate in an environment, giving people adequate warning to safely ventilate the area or evacuate. Some system-connected detectors also alert a monitoring service that can dispatch emergency services if necessary.

Every home with at least one fuel-burning appliance/heater, attached garage or fireplace should have a carbon monoxide alarm. If the home has only one carbon monoxide alarm, it should be installed in the main bedroom or in the hallway outside of the sleeping area. An alarm should be installed on every level of the home and in sleeping areas.

Acceptability Criteria

- OHCD must ensure that the location of smoke detectors conforms with local and/or State Fire Marshall’s requirements. OHCD must determine that smoke detectors are located and installed in accordance with NFPA Standards. All smoke detectors must be in operating condition.
- Local codes, such as housing or fire codes, often address responsibilities between owners and tenants for installation and maintenance of smoke detector batteries. At initial, inspection smoke detectors must have good batteries and be operable. OHCD must follow local codes

Chapter 8.A.

to determine if missing or dead smoke detector batteries constitute a tenant or owner-caused failure in occupied units.

- Consultation with the local fire officials is recommended regarding acceptable types and location of smoke detectors

Hazards and Health/Safety

The unit, interior and exterior common areas accessible to the family, the site, and the surrounding neighborhood must be free of hazards to the family's health and safety.

Chapter 8.A.

EXHIBIT 8-2: SUMMARY OF TENANT PREFERENCE AREAS RELATED TO HOUSING QUALITY

Note: This document provides an overview of unit and site characteristics and conditions for which the family determines acceptability. For more detailed information see the following documents:

- Housing Choice Voucher Guidebook, Chapter 10.
- HUD Housing Inspection Manual for Section 8 Housing
- HUD Inspection Form, form HUD-52580 (3/01) and Inspection Checklist, form HUD-52580-A (9/00)

Provided the minimum housing quality standards have been met, HUD permits the family to determine whether the unit is acceptable with regard to the following characteristics.

- *Sanitary Facilities.* The family may determine the adequacy of the cosmetic condition and quality of the sanitary facilities, including the size of the lavatory, tub, or shower; the location of the sanitary facilities within the unit; and the adequacy of the water heater.
- *Food Preparation and Refuse Disposal.* The family selects size and type of equipment it finds acceptable. When the family is responsible for supplying cooking appliances, the family may choose to use a microwave oven in place of a conventional oven, stove, or range. When the owner is responsible for providing cooking appliances, the owner may offer a microwave oven in place of an oven, stove, or range only if other subsidized and unsubsidized units on the premises are furnished with microwave ovens only. The adequacy of the amount and type of storage space, the cosmetic conditions of all equipment, and the size and location of the kitchen are all determined by the family.
- *Space and Security.* The family may determine the adequacy of room sizes and room locations. The family is also responsible for deciding the acceptability of the type of door and window locks.
- *Energy conservation items.* The family may determine whether the amount of insulation, presence of absence of storm doors and windows and other energy conservation items are acceptable.
- *Illumination and Electricity.* The family may determine whether the location and the number of outlets and fixtures (over and above those required to meet HQS standards) are acceptable or if the amount of electrical service is adequate for the use of appliances, computers, or stereo equipment.
- *Structure and Materials.* Families may determine whether minor defects, such as lack of paint, or worn flooring or carpeting will affect the livability of the unit.
- *Indoor Air.* Families may determine whether window and door screens, filters, fans, or other devices for proper ventilation are adequate to meet the family's needs. However, if screens are present, they must be in good condition.
- *Sanitary Conditions.* The family determines whether the sanitary conditions in the unit, including minor infestations, are acceptable.

Chapter 8.A.

- *Neighborhood conditions.* Families may determine whether neighborhood conditions such as the presence of drug activity, commercial enterprises, and convenience to shopping will affect the livability of the unit.

Families have no discretion with respect to lead-based paint standards and smoke detectors.