



## Phone test finds local landlords break fair housing rules

By NANCY RASKAUSKAS, CORVALLIS GAZETTE-TIMES | Posted: Friday, April 8, 2011 5:39 pm

Only two out of 15 landlords in Corvallis complied with federal fair housing rules in answering rental inquiry calls placed by a Mexican national, a disabled person with a service animal and an applicant with children.

The Fair Housing Council of Oregon reported the findings to the City of Corvallis after testers working with the council cold-called landlords and rental agents in 2010 to see how they would react to housing requests.

The same companies or landlords were also called by a “comparator” tester who was a white American, with no disabilities and no children.

Federal fair housing laws prohibit discrimination in the sale, rental, and sexual orientation, financing of dwellings and in other housing-related transactions, based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status and disability.

Oregon law adds marital status, source of income, victims of domestic violence (including sexual assault and stalking), and Corvallis goes further to include level of income, gender identity or expression, religious observance and age.

In Corvallis, callers used a tester who was a native of Mexico and who spoke English with an accent or a person calling on behalf of a “Mexican friend,” who would disclose during the phone call that their “friend” spoke limited English.

Nine of the landlords “failed” by stating rules that break federal anti-discrimination laws or quoting different prices to different individuals.

On the test involving people with disabilities, even if a property owner has a “no pets” policy, fair housing rules say that exceptions must be made. That’s so people with disabilities who rely on guide animals have free choice about where to live, said Maloy Good, executive director of the Fair Housing Council of Oregon. The rules are even stricter than the Americans with Disabilities Act, which protects the rights of the disabled in workplaces and public buildings.

On another test, one landlord asked a caller if he had children; the landlord then stated that he would not rent to families, only singles and couples.

“That’s a textbook example of discrimination,” Good said.

These tests were done as a way of informing city of Corvallis officials about trends in the community. The names of the landlords and rental agents that were tested are kept confidential.

In response to the test findings, the City of Corvallis Housing Division will sponsor a series of fair housing training events beginning with a landlord-focused session on June 21.

“Even though we’re all very disappointed with what we see, the response is positive,” Good said.

Interested citizens can contact the city’s rental specialist, Bob Loewen at 541-766-6944 to sign up for or find out about the events. For more about the city’s housing assistance programs, see [www.ci.corvallis.or.us/housing](http://www.ci.corvallis.or.us/housing).

People who feel they have been a victim of housing discrimination can contact the Fair Housing Council at 800-424-3247. For more information about the council, see [www.fhco.org](http://www.fhco.org).

Contact reporter Nancy Raskauskas at [nancy.raskauskas@lee.net](mailto:nancy.raskauskas@lee.net) or 541-758-9542.