

Community concern or issue: *Inadequate Maintenance* of owner-occupied and tenant-occupied residences

How does this issue impact citizen health or the environment?

Poorly maintained homes may have problems with moisture, cleanliness, ventilation, pests, and chemical contaminants, which increase health risks for the inhabitants, especially very young children and older adults who are in the home for longer periods of time on a daily basis. Childhood lead poisoning, injuries, respiratory diseases such as asthma, and quality of life issues have been linked to the more than six million substandard housing units nationwide. Residents of these units are also at increased risk for fire, electrical injuries, falls, rodent bites, and other illnesses and injuries. Other issues of concern include exposure to pesticide residues, indoor toxicants, tobacco smoke, and combustion gases. The burning of oil, gas, and kerosene can release a variety of combustion products, including carbon monoxide, a known cause of illness and death.

Existing controls or standards

Three Salina agencies are responsible for following up on complaints and conducting inspections of owner- and tenant-occupied residences. These are the Salina Housing Authority, Salina Neighborhood Services, and Saline County Planning.

How is this issue impacting Salina?

Officials from each of the three agencies indicated areas of concern include moisture, plumbing, weatherization, trash, furnace, and substandard housekeeping. More complaints were from tenant-occupied homes than owner-occupied homes. Almost 80% of the homes in Salina were built before 1978 and may be susceptible to lead paint issues. The Salina Planning Department receives more

calls on mold than anything else, which department regulations do not cover. Low standards also impact housing values, creating a neighborhood poverty spiral. Community health and medical resources are impacted with substandard healthy homes.

What factors and behaviors contribute to this problem?

The community is affected by limited government resources and budgets of the three agencies involved in oversight of the healthy housing standards. However, the community also has many advocates for different issues including those related to healthy homes, which is a positive factor for addressing long-term issues outlined in this paper.

Contributing factors appear to be lack of education, low income, inability to keep up with maintenance, and lack of resources or initiative for landlords. Another contributing factor has been the inability of each agency to monitor healthy home data to assess program needs and provide feedback for management of healthy home initiatives.

Potential solutions – how can the community help with this issue?

There are at least four topics the Salina community can address that would assist with improving healthy homes: education, enforcement, addressing poverty issues, and finally, a more proactive landlord association.