

INADEQUATE HOME MAINTENANCE

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ISSUE PROFILE

Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE)
Environmental Sustainability for the Salina Community

Issue: Inadequate maintenance of owner-occupied and tenant-occupied residences

Background: A healthy home is designed, constructed, maintained, and rehabilitated in a manner that is conducive to occupant health. These homes are dry, clean, ventilated, pest-free, safe, contaminant-free, and maintained. On the other hand, poorly maintained homes may have problems with moisture, cleanliness, ventilation, pests, and chemical contaminants. Damp homes provide an environment for mites, roaches, rodents, and molds, which are often associated with asthma. Clean homes reduce infestations of pests and reduce exposure to contaminants. In addition, occupants can be exposed to contaminants such as tobacco smoke, pesticides, asbestos, carbon monoxide, lead, and radon. Adequate supplies of fresh air improve respiratory health and reduce levels of contaminants that accumulate in poorly ventilated homes.

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. (CDC Healthy Homes: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/newhealthyhomes.htm>)

Nationally, statistics show that 17.5 % of homes have exterior problems, 4.6% are missing roofing, 10.3% have exterior leakage and water issues, 8.2% are uncomfortably cold, .09% use their cooking stove as the primary heating source, 1.1% have room heaters without a flue, 7.6% have no working fire alarm, 56% have fire extinguishers that have not been inspected for more than two years, 67% have no carbon monoxide alarm, 5.5% have mice, 3.4% have leaky pipes, 7.9% have interior water leakage, 4.8% have open cracks or holes, 9.1 % have blown fuses or breakers, and only 63% have a warm-air furnace according to an American Housing Survey (AHS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2007. Home safety is important because young children spend 70% and elderly spend 90% of their time in their home, and \$9.2 billion is spent on neurobehavioral disorders, \$2 billion for asthma, according to the National Center for Healthy Housing. Unhealthy homes impact 5.8 million (5.2%) homes nationally.

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. The authorities for the agencies are as follows:

Saline County Code of Ordinances

- Chapter 5 (Buildings)
- Chapter 9.5 (Environmental Control)
- Chapter 11 (Health)
- Chapter 18 (Traffic and Motor Vehicles)
- Chapter 19 (Vegetation)

Salina City Code

- Chapter 8 (Buildings and Structural Appurtenances)
- Chapter 18 (Housing)

Salina Housing Authority

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Housing Quality Standards (HQS) for Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Properties

These agencies collaborate well and do not overlap. A list of inspections for the past year from each agency has commonalities and differences. A ranking of complaints or issues from most-common to least-common at each agency follows:

| Salina Housing Authority Recorded Complaints | Saline Planning Dept. Recorded Complaints | Salina Neighborhood Services Recorded Complaints |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Weatherization, doors, and windows | 1. Moisture, plumbing issues | 1. External Trash |
| 2. Bad sewers and plugged lines | 2. Furnace issues | 2. Excessive vegetation, weeds |
| 3. Leaky plumbing from valves, lines, and gaps around plumbing | 3. External doors leaking air or not functioning properly | 3. Limbs |
| 4. Lack of insulation in walls and ceilings | 4. Windows broken, sealed shut, or not functioning | 4. Inoperable vehicles |
| 5. Broken electrical outlets | 5. Leaky roofs | 5. Graffiti |
| 6. Lack of good housekeeping (substandard), pests, and insects | 6. Mold | 6. Unsecured refrigerators |
| 7. Overgrown vegetation, fences, and mowing | | 7. Animals |
| 8. Tree trimming | | 8. Odor and sewage |
| 9. Lead paint | | |

Community-Specific Indicators:

What does the data say? Salina experiences some of the same issues and problems that occur nationwide and are recognized by the National Center for Healthy Housing as a concern for healthy living. While gathering this data, interviews were conducted with officials from each of the three agencies. Local issues of concern include: moisture, plumbing, weatherization, trash, furnace, and substandard housekeeping. Agency officials also noted the following:

- More complaints were from tenant-occupied homes than owner-occupied homes.
- Saline County Planning Department planning officials stated that eight out of 10 complaints in their reports are probably valid. Neighborhood Services and Housing Authority included valid complaints in their data.
- A majority of complaints come from residences in north and west Salina. Poverty plays a role in healthy housing issues.

- Bedbugs are a new concern, with three recent known cases in the last year compared to a lack of cases in several previous years.
- Salina has 12,464 houses built prior to 1976 and 3,935 houses built after 1976. This means 76% of the homes may be susceptible to lead paint issues.
- The Salina Planning Department receives more calls on mold than anything else, but the mold issues turn out to be issues that department regulations do not cover, or they are something other than mold-related as defined by regulations.

Who is affected? A city of Salina map (see attachment) of low and moderate income housing shows that the geographical neighborhoods of north and west Salina residences are where the majority of low-income and tenant-occupied residences are located. This area includes many children and elderly, which national data show are more vulnerable to unhealthy home environments. Interviews with the three agencies indicate that a majority of their complaints come from this area.

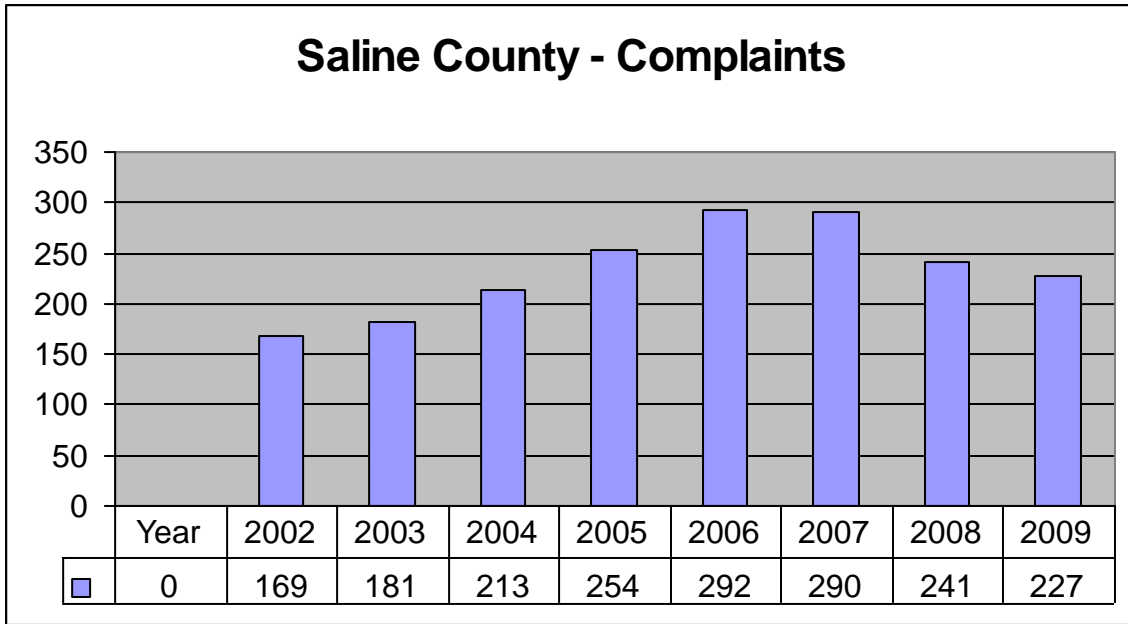
How is the community affected? Low standards also impact housing values, creating a neighborhood poverty spiral. Community health and medical resources are impacted with substandard healthy homes.

What are the contributing factors and behaviors of the community? The community is affected by the limited government resources and budgets of the three agencies involved in oversight of the healthy housing standards. Currently, there are only two to three employees within Neighborhood Services, three to four in Saline County Planning, and one to two people at the Salina Housing Authority. Salina is a progressive community with many active service groups and social agencies. The community offers economic development tax incentives and recently conducted a long-term strategic plan that identified north and west Salina as targets for long-term planning. 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. Neighborhood Services has a software program that allows them to accumulate and classify data (complaints and service calls), however the Saline County Planning Department has a need for a software program which will allow them to gather and classify data more easily in order to assess program needs and provide feedback for management of healthy home initiatives.

How does a community protect itself? There are four topics the Salina community can address that would assist with improving healthy homes. The first is education, the second is enforcement, the third is addressing poverty issues, and finally a more pro-active landlord association can help address these issues.



Over the years the Salina Planning Department (and other agencies) has actively enforced local ordinances and codes. This includes annual educational/training seminars. According to trending data from Saline County Planning Department (*See table: Saline County Complaints*) these educational programs are proving useful and may have helped maintain and lower complaints in the past few years.

The second issue of addressing poverty issues can be accomplished partly through education as well as targeting community resources in north and west Salina.

Finally, with the exception of the three agencies and the local health department, no local advocate or group specifically focuses on healthy home issues. Since tenant-occupied complaints are greater than owner-occupied complaints, another contributing factor might be that there is no active landlord association that can serve in a proactive manner to address issues related to this paper.

Date Sources: Data from and interviews with Salina Housing Authority, city of Salina Neighborhood Services, Saline County Planning Department
 National Center for Healthy Housing handbook, 2009
 CDC Healthy Homes: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/newhealthyhomes.htm>

Age of Data: 2008 and 2009.

Additional Data Needed: A database program in the Saline County Planning Department would preserve data in order to classify and identify different types of healthy home issues. This would help with the coordination of data between agencies in order to see the overall picture and generate a longer term trend analysis on the individual issues. Finally, more comparison of local data to national data would be useful. Also, gathering data on medical and health issues including chronic illness, temporary illness, and recent hospitalization would assist the community in assessing the impact of unhealthy homes.

Paper prepared by Terri Biester and Greg Stephens, January 2010.