

Follow-up to discrimination report - 3/8/2022

Since the beginning of our lease there has been issues with maintenance requests along with unequal division of responsibility between the two units. Related to this initial report, December 16th, we noticed there was bad insulation in the house due to having old windows, one was even cracked, and we sent a request to have it looked at/fixed, soon after we received a high energy bill. They caulked the seal which did not help very much, and we decided to cover the windows with plastic to help.

January 16th, I sent the manager an email requesting information regarding the basement since the lease did not show the utility breakdown. I had mentioned our unit's concern for our energy bill that was nearly four times higher than the upstairs unit along with a furnace pipe that had no cover on it and was blowing hot air for months.

January 24th, I followed up with an image of said pipe, requesting a response. January 25th, the manager asked if I was available for a phone call in which I responded the next day with 2 dates and times where I was available, and she failed to do so.

The property owner did however, come and replace the cover on the furnace sometime after.

That was the end of this thread. The day I sent in the discrimination report (Feb 22nd), I was in conversation with the manager via email regarding a citation we had to pay, requesting the breakdown of the bill as well as energy costs since she hadn't clarified. After I was informed about the breakdown,

Alexus:

With regard to this question today and your questions from a few weeks ago:

Each unit is metered separately and receives an Xcel billing for their gas/electric usage. The water heater and furnace for your unit are in the basement of the property. The water heater and wall furnace for the upstairs is inside their unit. As I mentioned in my email to all tenants a few weeks ago regarding shoveling, frozen pipes, etc. there are significant recent increases in global gas costs that are affecting everyone who has a gas mechanical, including the upstairs tenants. If the electric portion of your bill is higher than normal, it has nothing to do with the furnaces in either unit because both operate on gas. Running space heaters can increase your electric usage charges dramatically, so if anyone is doing that at all it will increase your electric charge portion of your bill.

Our gas portion for the Xcel bill ranged from \$8-\$12 a day, Electric ranging from \$2-\$3 a day for the past 3 months.

I then asked about these open items from January

“Thank you for some clarification,

I understand the difference in energy costs based on unit sizes, however there is still a significant gap in our bills. I would like to know if we are then paying for the use of the washer/dryer.”

To which she responded:

“The electricity used to power the washer and dryer is part of the lower unit's charges. It is not broken out for a third, separate energy bill. That is very typical for duplexes and especially in La Crosse with the old housing stock. We take this into account when setting monthly rental rates for our units. We've been informed by an electrician that even if the washer and dryer are operated every day, it is still less than a dollar a day (around 60 cents) to run both in terms of electricity costs. That is not a significant amount. It would cost significantly more for each tenant to use a laundromat for their laundry. When the unit was purchased, the upper tenants were allowed access to use the washer/dryer and we have continued with that practice. You would still pay the same energy charges for the use of the appliances even if we didn't allow the upstairs tenants to also use it. Of course, there is no requirement for us to provide a washer/dryer at all and they can be removed or disconnected at any time. This is outlined in your lease agreement.

If you are concerned that you are paying an unfair amount, we don't have a lot of options without punishing the upstairs tenants. We can inform the upstairs tenants that they may no longer have access to the washer/dryer but that seems rather punitive unnecessarily. You will still be responsible for the electric service to those appliances. The difference in cost without them using it is negligible. Or we can disconnect or remove the washer and dryer completely so that you don't consider it "unfair." Frankly, it's about balance as we are trying to provide the benefit to all tenants in the building.”

I can see how our concern for high energy bills could be deemed “unfair” to an extent, however threatening to disconnect the units, and having more concern for the upstairs tenants who use the units much more than us is unreasonable. Additionally, I would like to mention that they were not aware that the washer/dryer was not spilt for our unit as it was not outlined in the lease. We do have an inspector coming to look at the house this week in regards to other safety concerns we have.

Alexus Aleman