

3/17/05

ATF – Environmental Subcommittee

Presentation before Board of Supervisors
City Services & Neighborhood Operations Committee
on 3/21/05 at 1:00 p.m.
City Hall, Room 263

Revised recommendation to focus on ATF working with SF Housing Authority (from Supervisor S. Maxwell in letter to G. Fortner, dated 1/29/04): **“...to assist the SF HA in becoming more proactive in managing and/or preventing indoor air quality issues in its public housing units that might exacerbate and/or contribute to the onset of asthma.”**

1. My Introduction

Chair, Supervisors, my name is or

Chair, Supervisors, I am the non-voting ATF member from the DBI, appointed by my Director.

Ms Cohn has presented an overview of the past, present and potential future relationship between the SFHA, the ATF and other agencies.

The purpose of my presentation is more specific. It is about my experience in housing inspection, enforcing minimum code standards and the successful partnerships that I have been involved in between DBI and other City agencies. Why this presentation, because of the similarities between the DBI and the SFHA to ensure a minimum standard that (per the SFBC) “safeguards life or limb, health, property and public welfare.... T(t)o protect the safety or health of the occupants or the occupants of adjacent properties or the public by reason of inadequate maintenance, dilapidation, obsolescence or abandonment...”

2. My Background

The preponderance of my experience at DBI has been in housing inspection/code enforcement, which I have been part of in some fashion since March 1983. I have been employed in other City departments since 1969 except for a brief leave in order to complete my education in architecture.

In 1985-6 (approx.), I was part of a “Complete Inspection” sweep of all the SFHA public housing projects. Housing inspectors from the then DPW-BBI performed the sweep. Our charge was to perform inspections of all units/public areas, cite code violations and follow up on the abatement of the violations cited. Most of the issued Notices of Violation were abated by the SFHA.

Currently, I manage the Lead Abatement Section, which includes the authority to enforce the SFBC 3407, Work Practices Program for Lead-Based Paint Disturbance and Removal. I have participated on the SFBC 3407 development and managed it since before the legislation’s inception in January 1998.

I feel I have seen it all when it comes to housing inspection and code enforcement. I have no bias against, and, I am not an advocate for, either the tenant or the property owner. I believe my charge is to call the code/explain the code.

3. Amenable Relationship between ATF and SFHA

Because of this, I feel I have been allowed to look at the Subcommittee's recommendations and the SFHA's responses to the recommendations in a critical/analytical way.

The SFHA management/staff has been helpful/candid/information flowed freely. They opened themselves and educated us. From what the SFHA presented, I found their responsibilities daunting and believe that they probably have too few resources, whether it is monetary, staff, technology... But, unfortunately I also found the SFHA responses to the ATF recommendations wanting.

5. Original Recommendation

The original recommendation was modeled after the "Complete Inspection" sweep. It was to create an inter-agency task force through a MOU to inspect each SFHA public housing property every three years and create accountability mechanisms to bring code violation into compliance within one year, prioritizing life-safety hazards compliance within three months. The ATF would review the purpose and effectiveness of the MOU in ten years and make a recommendation to the Board as to whether or not to continue with the MOU.

6. Explanation of Rationale for Original Recommendation

The idea behind the original recommendation was twofold: a) to repeat what seemed like the thoroughness of a third party/outside agencies to cite code violations through periodic sweeps; and, b) assist the SFHA with an inspection staffing resource. The recommendation was developed after listening to the ATF stakeholders (i.e., tenants in the public housing) concerns/testimony.

Using outside agencies citing the code was important for several reasons but the most important was the link between the code and healthy housing/good health. Some of the more typical causal triggers of asthma are: moisture intrusion (from leaks, improper/lack of ventilation), mold (from moisture) and body parts of cockroaches/rodents (from food/garbage/debris). The SFBC/SFHC/SFMC/SFPC have sections that address those triggers, both for new construction and for maintenance. There are sections on light and natural/mechanical ventilation, weather-resistive barriers, flashing, waterproofing, drainage/drains, dampness, mold/mildew, openable window area, bars on windows, inadequate sanitation/safety, infestation of insects/vermin/rodents, dilapidation, maintenance...

7. Recommendation Evolves

As Ms Cohn described the recommendation has evolved to "assist the SFHA in becoming more proactive in managing and preventing indoor air quality issues....". And, to that end, the ATF developed a new recommendation with 9 topic areas. Topic areas included staffing/resources, database/data analysis, public relations, tenant education, etc.

8. Topic Areas and Partnerships

The document you have before you lists the topic areas and describes the ATF recommendation/rationale and the SFHA responses. Most of the topic areas are evolving into potential partnership opportunities.

I would like to say that partnerships do not have to be threatening. I have briefly mentioned the partnership that has already existed between the SFHA and DBI when the DBI did inspect their property in the 1980's. It was labor intensive but relatively successful. I have been involved in other successful partnerships during my time with the DBI. DBI had a MOU with DHR (DSS) and other City agencies to do quarterly inspections on the "homeless hotels". DBI partnered with DOE on the CECO. DBI is now partnering with the LHRCAC, DPH-CLPP and MOH on the SFBC 3407. I would consider all of these successful partnerships. And, I would encourage the SFHA to consider those topic areas with partnerships as a positive opportunity to further engage in.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to read a short paragraph from the SFHC that I believe says it all. "That it is in the public interest of the people of San Francisco to protect and promote the existence of sound and wholesome residential buildings, dwelling units and neighborhoods by the adoption and enforcement of such standards, regulations and procedures as will remedy the existence or prevent the development or creation of dangerous, substandard, unsanitary or obsolete and deficient residential buildings and dwelling units."

In reading the SFHC, I say that everyone is responsible in helping find resolution for the SFHA, everyone is, ultimately a stakeholder.