

STATE OF VERMONT
SUPERIOR COURT
WASHINGTON UNIT

VT SUPERIOR COURT
WASHINGTON UNIT
CIVIL DIVISION

2016 MAY -21 P 2:44

In Re: SHIRES HOUSING, INC.)

CIVIL DIVISION

) Docket No. 254-S-1612nc

FILED

ASSURANCE OF DISCONTINUANCE

The State of Vermont, by and through Vermont Attorney General William H. Sorrell, and Respondent Shires Housing, Inc. (“Shires” or “Respondent”), hereby enter into this Assurance of Discontinuance (“AOD”) pursuant to 9 V.S.A. § 2459.

Shires Housing, Inc.

1. Shires is a not-for-profit corporation with its principal place of business at 302 South Street, P.O. Box 1247, Bennington, Vermont 05201. Shires provides affordable housing for limited income residents in Bennington County, Vermont.
2. Shires is the owner of five rental properties, containing 23 total rental units, located at: 233 School Street (5 units), 119-121 Pleasant Street (4 units), 50 Carrigan Lane (7 units), 100 Carrigan Lane (2 units), and 316 Safford Street (5 units), all located in Bennington, Vermont (collectively, “the Properties”).
3. The Properties were all constructed prior to 1978, and therefore, are pre-1978 “rental target housing” within the meaning of the Vermont lead law, 18 V.S.A. § 1751(23), and are all subject to the requirements of 18 V.S.A. Chapter 38.

Regulatory Framework

4. Lead-based paint in housing, the focus of the Vermont lead law, is a leading cause of childhood lead poisoning, which can result in adverse health effects, including decreases in IQ.

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5. All paint in pre-1978 housing is presumed to be lead-based unless a certified inspector has determined that it is not lead-based. 18 V.S.A. § 1759(a).
6. All paint in rental target housing is “presumed to be lead-based unless a lead inspector or lead risk assessor has determined that it is not lead-based.” 18 V.S.A. § 1760(a).
7. The lead law requires that essential maintenance practices (“EMPs”) specified in 18 V.S.A. § 1759 be performed at all pre-1978 rental housing.
8. EMPs include, but are not limited to, installing window well inserts, visually inspecting properties at least annually for deteriorated paint, restoring surfaces to be free of deteriorated paint within 30 days after such paint has been visually identified or reported to the owner, and posting lead-based paint hazard information in a prominent place. 18 V.S.A. § 1759(a) (2), (4) and (7).
9. The EMP requirements also mandate that an owner of rental target housing file affidavits or compliance statements attesting to EMP performance with the Vermont Department of Health and with the owner’s insurance carrier. 18 V.S.A. § 1759(b).
10. A violation of the lead law requirements may result in a maximum civil penalty of \$10,000.00. 18 V.S.A. § 130(b)(6). Each day that a violation continues is a separate violation. 18 V.S.A. § 130(b)(6).
11. The Vermont Consumer Protection Act, 9 V.S.A Chapter 63, prohibits unfair and deceptive acts and practices, which includes the offering for rent, or the renting of, target housing that is noncompliant with the lead law.

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12. Violations of the Consumer Protection Act are subject to a civil penalty of up to \$10,000.00 per violation. 9 V.S.A. § 2458(b)(1). Each day that a violation continues is a separate violation.

Respondent's Rental Housing and Lead Compliance Practices

13. Shires is the owner of the Properties which it has in the past and continues presently to rent and offer for rent.
14. On August 17, 2015, Respondent filed with the Vermont Department of Health an "EMP Rental Property Compliance Statement" for each of the Properties (hereinafter "EMP Statements").
15. The EMP Statements represent that Respondent performed EMPs at the Properties on July 30, 2015.
16. The EMP Statements specifically certify that Respondent:
- a. visually inspected exterior surfaces and outbuildings;
 - b. stabilized exterior paint; and
 - c. did not identify deteriorated paint exceeding one square foot on exterior surfaces of the buildings.
17. The EMP Statements were signed by Bernard McDonald and certified that "all information provided on this form is true and accurate" and acknowledged that "providing false, incomplete or inaccurate information on this form is unlawful and is punishable by civil and criminal penalties pursuant to Vermont law."
18. On October 15, 2015, Vermont Department of Health staff inspected the exterior surfaces of the Properties and documented (via photographs) deteriorated paint exceeding more than one square foot on all of the exterior surfaces of the Properties.

19. Respondent admits the truth of the facts described in ¶¶ 1-3; 13-18.
20. Respondent admits that Mr. McDonald falsely certified by signing the EMP statements and allege that Mr. McDonald's actions in certifying compliance were actions that he took on his own initiative, without the knowledge or approval of his employers at Shires Housing. Respondent alleges that the conduct of Mr. McDonald represents an isolated incident not in keeping with the standards of Shires Housing.

The State's Allegations

21. The Vermont Attorney General's Office alleges the following violations of the Consumer Protection Act:
 - a. Submitting false EMP Statements and inaccurately representing that the Properties were in compliance with the lead law.
22. The State of Vermont alleges that the above behavior constitutes unfair and deceptive acts and practices under 9 V.S.A. § 2453.

Assurances and Relief

In lieu of instituting an action or proceeding against Respondents, the Attorney General and Respondent are willing to accept this AOD pursuant to 9 V.S.A. § 2459.

Accordingly, the parties agree as follows:

23. Respondent shall fully and timely comply with the requirements of the Vermont lead law, 18 V.S.A., Chapter 38, as long as it maintains any ownership or property management interest in the Properties and in any other pre-1978 rental housing in which they currently have, or later acquire, an ownership interest.

24. By May 31, 2016, Respondent shall hire, at its expense, an EMP-certified independent contractor to conduct compliance inspections and perform all EMP work of the interior and exterior of the Properties as specified in 18 V.S.A. § 1759.
25. Within one week of completion of the EMP work at the Properties described in the paragraph above, Respondent will file with the Vermont Department of Health, Respondent's insurance carrier and with the Office of the Attorney General, a completed EMP compliance statement for all properties, and will give a copy of the compliance statement to an adult in each rented unit of all properties. The copy for the Office of the Attorney General shall be sent to: Justin Kolber, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General, 109 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05609.
26. In the event Respondent wishes to rent a unit which becomes vacant in any of Respondent's pre-1978 rental housing before such housing is made EMP compliant, Respondent shall provide advance written notice of the intent to rent to the Office of the Attorney General at the address listed above. Respondent's advance written notice shall also: (1) verify that the interior of the specific unit to be rented is EMP compliant; (2) provide an update as to any remaining EMP work to be performed at the property, including the date by which the entire property will be EMP compliant. Otherwise, Respondent shall not rent, or offer for rent, any unit which becomes vacant in any of the properties that is not EMP compliant until such time as the EMP work is complete and the EMP compliance statement is distributed as described above.

27. Respondent shall pay the sum of \$20,000 in civil penalties and costs for the filing of false EMP compliance statements. Based on Respondent's demonstrated inability to pay the full penalty and upon review of financial information provided to the State by Respondent, the State agrees to accept a reduced penalty of \$1,000. Payment of the \$1,000 shall be made to the "State of Vermont" and shall be sent within 15 days of the entry of this AOD to the Vermont Attorney General's Office at the following address: Justin E. Kolber, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General, 109 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05609.

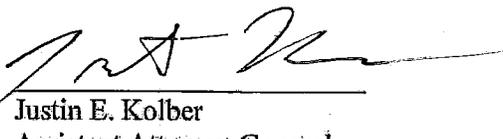
Other Terms

28. This AOD is binding on Respondent, however, sale of any pre-1978 rental property may not occur unless Respondent has complied with all obligations under this AOD, or this AOD is amended in writing to transfer to the buyer or other transferee all remaining obligations.
29. Transfer of ownership of any of Respondent's pre-1978 rental properties shall be consistent with Vermont law, including the provisions of 18 V.S.A. § 1767 specifically relating to the transfer of ownership of pre-1978 rental housing.
30. This AOD shall not affect marketability of title.
31. Nothing in this AOD in any way affects Respondent's other obligations under state, local, or federal law.
32. In addition to any other penalties or relief which might be appropriate under Vermont law, any future failure by Respondent to comply with the terms of this AOD shall be subject to a liquidated civil penalty paid to the State of Vermont in the amount of at least \$5,000 and not more than \$10,000.

DATED at Montpelier, Vermont this 29th day of April, 2016.

STATE OF VERMONT

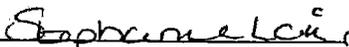
WILLIAM H. SORRELL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

By: 

Justin E. Kolber
Assistant Attorney General
Office of the Attorney General
109 State Street
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justin.kolber@vermont.gov

DATED at ~~BENNINGTON~~, Vermont this 28th day of April, 2016.

SHIRES HOUSING, INC.

By: 
Its Authorized Agent

STEPHANIE LANE, EXEC. DIRECTOR
Name and Title of Authorized Agent

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