



Why Pet Fees are a Necessary Landlord Strategy



The topic of pet fees can be a sensitive one. Tenants can feel that pet fees are simply an unfair tax that they're forced to pay for being pet owners. As a landlord, this may cause you to have some hesitations about including pet rent and fees in your pet policy. However, it's important to remember why these fees exist in the first place. This guide outlines some of the many reasons why charging pet fees is a necessary part of your rental strategy.



The Costs and Challenges of Allowing Pets in Your Rental Properties

By allowing pets in your rentals, you open up your tenant pool to the 75% of renters that own pets. While that can definitely help decrease vacancies on your property and increase the monthly rent you're able to charge, allowing pets comes with its own unique challenges.

Pet-Related Complaints From Neighboring Tenants

Allowing pets into your rentals will inevitably open the door for pet-related complaints from other tenants. The severity of these complaints will ultimately depend on the types of pets and pet owners you choose to accept.

Your renters expect a certain level of cleanliness in the hallways and common areas of the property. Should they spot a pet mess while they're enjoying your amenities, you will likely receive a complaint. Even fellow pet owners have very little patience for those who choose not to pick up after their four-legged family members.

In addition to pet-related messes, there is also the issue of noise complaints. Whether it's excessive meowing, loud nails running around on the floor above, or barking throughout the night and working hours, pet noises can lead to some very disgruntled tenants.





Vacant Rentals

If you're unable to provide solutions to pet-related noise complaints, your tenants could have the right to break their lease without penalty. This can result in unexpected vacancies and a sudden loss in your rental income.

Having to evict a tenant that refuses to resolve their pet-related issues will incur some additional costs in addition to finding a new tenant for their now-vacant rental. By charging pet fees, you can be prepared for these unexpected vacancies and potential eviction costs.

Pet Waste Management

Pet waste becomes a problem when owners neglect to pick up after their animals. It can be overwhelming for you as the property manager or landlord to deal with tenant complaints regarding pet waste and odors left on your lawns, common areas, walkways, and driveways.

As it can often be difficult to catch the culprits that aren't cleaning up after their pets, many landlords are forced to hire waste management services to maintain the property throughout the day. Pet fees can help cover the

costs of these services that ensure your common areas are kept clean for all your residents.

Sometimes, a pet owner's failure to clean up their pet's waste is simply a matter of circumstance. It's not uncommon to forget to bring bags on a walk or to run out of waste bags at the most inconvenient time. While a good pet owner should return with a bag to clean up the mess, it's not often that they will. To help your tenants in these situations and to encourage them to pick up waste on your property, you can put some of your pet fees towards installing pet

waste stations. They'll run you about \$200, and you'll need to take care of routine bag refills, which can also add up quickly.

Pet DNA Testing

While waste management services help take care of the problem, they don't help prevent or eliminate it. A possible solution for the pet waste problem on your property is to add pet DNA testing as part of your policy. There are several companies that offer this service as a means for landlords to track down which dog owners aren't picking up after their pooch.





By making it a requirement for all pet owners to provide DNA samples of their dogs before moving in, you can identify and communicate with the appropriate tenant much sooner, issuing any predetermined fines or consequences listed in your policy. Pet fees can help cover the cost of using these DNA testing services that will help solve the issue much faster.

Pet-Related Damage to Your Rental Property

It's much easier to recoup the cost of any damages that your tenant's pets may cause by receiving pet deposits upfront.

Common damage includes:

- Torn up blinds
- Scratched carpets and floors
- Stained walls and carpets
- Dug up carpets or landscaping
- Chewed moldings and walls

While normal wear and tear of the rental are covered by the landlord, damage caused by pets is the tenant's responsibility. Carpets are among the most costly repairs for landlords. While a typical carpet can last up to 10 years in a rental, that lifespan can be reduced by half if there are pets. Both cats and

dogs can cause some serious damage to carpeted floors with tears, pulls, and stains. The average cost to replace just 500sq. ft. of carpet is \$2400, which can be seen as a \$50 monthly loss on the unit if the landlord is required to replace it every five years instead of 10.

Trying to charge a tenant for repairs once they've already vacated the unit can be challenging, whereas charging pet fees, deposits, or even pet rent upfront can ensure that the funds are already secured for the necessary repairs. Once the repairs are complete, all that's left to do is provide them with an itemized list of the repairs and return

any part of their unused deposit if you choose to offer a refundable option.

Loss of Rental Income During Repair Downtime.

One of the biggest challenges landlords face is a loss in rental income when forced to close their unit for repairs. Since repairs can take upwards of two weeks or more, new tenants are unable to move in, resulting in the loss of rent in addition to the cost of the repairs. On a \$1,200 monthly rent, those two weeks can result in a \$600 loss, and that doesn't include the time it may take to assess the damages and get contractors on site.





Accommodating Tenants With Allergies

While the number of people with pet allergies isn't nearly as high as the number of renters with pets, it is still a large number of potential tenants that may be deterred by your pet-friendly policies. If you notice that this is a frequent issue from potential renters, you can use your existing pet fees to try and better accommodate future renters with pet allergies. Some solutions you can choose to include on your website and lease agreement to

show that you are both a pet-friendly and allergy-friendly property include:

- Routine deep cleaning of common areas
- Designated pet-free common areas
- Designated allergy-sensitive rentals that have never housed tenants with pets
- Quality air filtration system and air filter replacements
- Carpet-free flooring in units and common areas

Even the most well-intentioned landlord cannot guarantee an allergen-free environment on a pet-friendly property. However, these proactive steps can still make your rental a viable option for prospective tenants with less severe pet allergies.

Why Emotional Support Animals Pose a Costly Threat to Your Property

As emotional support animals (ESAs) are not legally considered pets, tenants with ESAs are not required to pay pet fees. They are covered by the Fair Housing Act, and landlords must

make accommodations for them or risk facing fines as high as \$65,000. Unfortunately, some tenants have used this loophole to avoid paying any pet fees by registering or falsely claiming their pets as ESAs.

The issue with ESAs is there is little regulation around them. Unlike service animals, an emotional support animal has not received an extensive amount of training or certification that can ensure its appropriate behavior in your rental.

Emotional support animals pose a threat to landlords as they leave landlords quite vulnerable. With





no upfront deposits or fees, there is very little a landlord can do to protect their property in the event of disturbances and damages. Luckily, owners of emotional support animals are still responsible for paying for any damages incurred by their companion. However, it can be time-consuming and costly to pursue the tenant for payment after damages to the unit have been identified after the unit is vacated.

It's important to note that ESAs must be accommodated even if the rental property isn't pet-friendly. To prevent any cases of fraudulent emotional support animals, incorporate ESA verification into your pet policy or trust a reliable service to handle this delicate matter for you. This will also ensure that you're compliant with the FHA rules and regulations.



**Charge the Right
Pet Fees With a
Comprehensive Pet
Policy**

Pet fees are certainly not an unfair tax levied by landlords. They exist to protect the property you own and provide a safe, pleasant environment for all of your tenants. The fees cover the materials and contractors needed to perform the repairs and serve as a buffer for the loss of rental income during the repair process. As mentioned above, you can also put these fees towards different services that will ensure the happiness of all your tenants on your pet-friendly property.

Your choice to allow pets attracts more tenants to your rentals, but it comes

with its own particular set of risks. To help mitigate those risks, make sure you have a comprehensive pet policy that details your fees, deposits, and the expectations you have of your pet-owning tenants.

OurPetPolicy can help alleviate the pressure of creating a pet addendum that ensures you are protected in the event of damages and the loss of rental income. For a pet-friendly rental without the added headaches and surprise costs, **contact OurPetPolicy** today.





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