

Battery Park tenants outraged over hard-line landlords

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Tenants of at least two Battery Park City apartment buildings are up in arms at their landlords for imposing hefty penalties on lease-breakers after the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

People who live in the waterfront community said the penalties would force many to live in a "war zone" as the neighborhood recovers from the aftermath of the twin-towers collapse nearby.

Many people there are concerned about air quality. Restrictions on access to the neighborhood, which is built on state-owned land, and the loss of subway service, stores and restaurants have drastically reduced the quality of life, tenants said.

Emotions are running particu-

larly high in River Watch at 70 Battery Place, where the landlord slipped letters under the doors of 200 apartments Wednesday telling tenants they must pay three months' rent to break their leases.

"I had wanted desperately to stay here, but their actions have myself and my fellow tenants extremely upset," said Joshua Rockoff, 25, a tenants committee member.

The landlord, the Brodsky Organization, has offered to reduce rents by 15% through April, but those at a tenants meeting Tuesday uniformly rejected that as not enough of an incentive for them to endure months of hardship, Rockoff said.

Tenants have talked of a rent strike but have yet to take legal steps.

A spokeswoman for Brodsky called the policy "fair."

"If a tenant has special circumstances, we would speak to them about it," said Sandi Rotkoff, leasing manager for Urban Associates, which manages River Watch for Brodsky.

More fights loom

Tenants of River Rose at 333 Rector Place are also banding to fight their landlord, Rockrose Development.

Rockrose recently halved the penalty for breaking a lease to one month's rent and offered a 25% rent reduction until current leases expire.

But as at River Watch, the terms were presented unilaterally by the landlord, which outraged tenants, said Howard

Tisch, 62, an attorney with a three-bedroom apartment in the 232-unit building.

Charles Singer, director of market research for Rockrose, said his company's terms are more lenient than others'.

The Lefrak Organization, which owns the 1,712-unit Gateway Plaza complex, isn't letting tenants break their leases or offering rent reductions, renters said.

Gateway sustained the most damage among residential properties in Battery Park City, and only one of its six buildings has reopened. Two more are scheduled to open tomorrow, according to the company's Web site.

Rents are being waived for the time its buildings are being repaired, and one month's rent

will be credited once a building is ready for occupancy, the Web site said.

Timothy Carey, president of the Battery Park City Authority, which oversees the 92-acre complex, said the agency is working with state and city officials to grant relief to Battery Park City's 9,000 residents.

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