

## LHO Complaint Flowchart

Refer to the flowchart below to help you follow logical steps in typical situations. The suggested timeframes are only examples. In very serious situations, you may simply go to court immediately and seek an injunction. In less serious situations, you may give the alleged offender five days to give you a rough plan of how he/she might correct the problem, with a 30 day follow-up after that.

*The length of time you may ask for corrective action varies and relates directly to how complex and how urgent the matter is.*

### Steps to Follow When Processing Reported Complaints and Situations

#### Document

Take notes of the call in a booklet designed for this purpose. Many times you can return to these notes and save time. If the complaint is about a third party, make sure you obtain all contact information including the name of the landlord, eating place, etc. Give the caller a date and time you anticipate following up by making an on-site visit. In many situations you can ask the caller to obtain further information. For example, maybe the landlord, neighbor, or whoever the complaint is about hasn't been contacted yet. This is an important first step.



#### Verify

Visit site of complaint to confirm the complaint. It is best to have someone accompany the LHO, someone who may also have a special skill to reinforce those of the LHO. For example, code enforcement officers or the local fire chiefs are good to have onsite, as they are familiar with the National Fire Protection Association Life Safety Code®. Remember to take photographs to document the situation – the more the better.



#### Meet

Discuss the problem with the owner or owner's representative. Since you will need to follow-up with a letter, you have to document what is said at the meeting. Ask probing questions to obtain information or intent that you can restate in the letter. If the complainant can be present that may be preferable – but that is the LHO's decision. Tell the owner you will be following up with a letter and will expect him/her to respond within a short time period as to what his/her intentions are.



## LHO Complaint Flowchart (continued)

### Follow Up

Call the owner after five days and ask what they are going to do. Do not accept an inexact response as a solution. You must receive sufficient supporting statements from the owner so you have a good feeling that the action(s) will be carried out. This is done by asking questions in more depth such as who, what, when, where, and why? Take notes. Tell the owner you will expect action in 30 days (or less depending upon the severity of the situation).



### Get Support

You must make sure you have the backing of the Board of Selectmen/Town Council/Mayor/City Manager. Eventually, an elected official will have to take responsibility for giving the LHO the authority to take action.



### Check Status

At the appointed time, contact the owner and determine the status of the corrective action. You should normally plan on someone else being with you to confirm everything said, and also to have another set of eyes for observation. Make sure that the owner understands that legal action will be taken if the problem isn't resolved.



### Give Last Chance

If the problem hasn't been properly addressed, it may be time to establish a last chance letter. After this, you will have to take further action. This may involve putting a lien on a property, going to court, committing the town to cleaning up the area and billing the owner.



### Go to Court

If all else fails, prepare to go to court. If there is nothing that you can do based on current law or ordinances, suggest to the complainant that he or she could individually take action at District Court.