

# Lived Experience Interviews Report 2024

## Bay Area Air Quality Management District | Kearns & West

### Background

K&W was engaged by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Air District) to conduct interviews with individuals living in different areas of the Bay Area to gain insight into their lived experience as it relates to housing insecurity, tenant displacement, energy burden, and other quality of life impacts that could be compounded from the implementation of Rules 9-4 and 9-6 (“Building Appliance Rules” or “Rules”). After January 1, 2027, these Rules will eliminate the sale and installation of natural gas-fired water heaters, and after January 1, 2029, the same will happen with furnaces. One key concern raised by stakeholders during the rulemaking process is the potential risk of displacement and/or pass-through costs for tenants resulting from the appliance upgrades needed to comply with the Rules.

Air District and K&W coordinated to recruit interviewees by reaching out to members of the Building Appliance Rules Implementation Working Group (IWG) and to other local community-based organizations from April to July. In the end, a total of nine (9) 45-minute interviews were conducted with community members. Interviewees resided in San Francisco, Marin, Alameda, and Santa Clara Counties. Eight were renters: three lived in multi-family buildings with less than five units and the rest resided in buildings between ten and twenty units. One lived in a homeless shelter but was a former renter. They were compensated for their time in the form of a gift card valued at \$56.25.

Questions generally covered the following topics: rental history and experiences with rental housing, including eviction, displacement, disruptions, and harassment; appliances, repairs, and construction; utility costs; health; and education and awareness. Takeaways and key themes are organized under the relevant topic areas, below.

### Takeaways and Key Themes

#### *Rental history and experiences with rental housing*

Rental housing histories varied widely among interviewees. The number of years they rented their current housing ranged from one year to fourteen. Most interviewees did not experience rent increases above 10% per year, but one-third of the interviewees did experience rent increases to fund proposed housing upgrades and renovations.

#### *Example anecdotes:*

- One landlord increased the rent of their tenant so that the landlord could fix an appliance and other issues around the apartment. The tenant honored the rental increase, but repairs were still not made after 60 days. This led the tenant to vacate the unit.

- One tenant experienced a rental increase which the landlord stated was for unexplained upgrades. The tenant, however, reported not seeing any upgrades or anything new.
- One tenant experienced a 5% increase twice within two months due to construction upgrades to the property.
- One tenant shared knowledge of rental increases above the legal limit due to exemptions from not having a legal rental contract and instead having an informal agreement.
- One tenant received a letter notifying them that their rental contract will convert to month-to-month, with a 5% rental increase. They became concerned about potential future rental increases.

*Quotes:*

Below are direct quotes from interviewees regarding their rental histories and experiences with rental housing. These quotes capture the personal perspectives of the interviewees.

“I felt that I was just paying [the rental increase] but [no repairs were] happening. I could not continue in such a place... Some people have their own ways of evading the law. People who rent should know more about the law to curb such things. Having these rental laws taught would help.”

“No tenía contrato y era un acuerdo informal. Muchas personas les gusta alquilar sin contrato formal, porque algunas veces los requisitos son muchos especialmente para latinos. He experimentado discriminación de vivienda por ser latino.”

*translation below*

“I didn’t have a contract and it was an informal agreement. Many people like to rent without a formal contract, because sometimes the requirements are a lot, especially for Latinos. I have experienced housing discrimination for being Latino.”

“Esto es una estrategia (converting to month-to-month agreements) que están usando para poder aumentar más del 10%... Si no firma entonces tendría que desalojar... lo mismo les está pasando a los vecinos.”

*translation below*

“This is a strategy (converting to month-to-month agreements) they are using to be able to increase the rent more than 10%. If I don’t sign, I would have to vacate [my unit]. The same thing is happening to the neighbors.”

### *Appliances, repairs, and construction*

Interviewees had varying experiences in relation to appliances, repairs, and construction. Regarding water heater and air conditioning unit installations, most interviewees had awareness of their unit’s water heaters, but only four out of the nine interviewees also had air conditioning. Four interviewees estimated that their appliances were less than three years old at most, but the other

five did not know. Four interviewees had to move from their previous housing due to the disruption caused by renovations and construction. For those that moved, only two of their four landlords provided housing recommendations and referrals for their tenants. None received financial support.

*Example anecdotes:*

- One tenant has a landlord that responds relatively quickly to fix any repairs, but tenants can pay extra for the landlord to prioritize their situation over any others in the building and get an even faster intervention.
- One tenant felt unsafe after a fire outbreak and uncomfortable with the construction afterwards. Despite not receiving any relocation support from the landlord, the tenant was able to move out after searching for more than two months for a new rental.
- Regarding repairs, two out of nine interviewees stated that they complete the necessary repairs themselves, because of fear of potential rent increases if they ask for repairs to be made.
  - One tenant had an issue with humidity in a closet, purchased a machine to remove humidity, and was not reimbursed or had rent reduced for the cost of the machine.
  - One tenant had an informal agreement with the landlord that the tenant would make necessary repairs in exchange for a waived deposit and no rental increases. The tenant moved to another unit under the same landlord, and the landlord broke the verbal agreement and raised the rent.

*Quotes:*

Below are direct quotes from interviewees regarding their appliances, repairs, and construction. These quotes capture the personal perspectives of the interviewees.

“I was scared [after the fire outbreak] and didn’t want something like that to happen again when I moved, so I took my time to find a new place...My landlord was concerned about our safety and finding accommodations. He was always there to help through recommendations and advice.”

“[el sistema de calefacción] funciona, pero no me gusta porque es de gas y es muy viejo. No me siento segura.”

*translation below*

“[the water heater] works, but I don’t like it because it’s gas and very old. I don’t feel safe.”

### *Utility costs*

Utility costs vary widely across similar income levels. Eight interviewees paid 15-40% of their monthly income for rent and utilities<sup>1</sup>. Six interviewees had annual household incomes below

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<sup>1</sup> Generally, for an energy bill to be considered affordable, it should cost 6% or less of a household’s gross income. There is an “energy burden” if more than 6% of that household’s income is needed to pay for their home energy costs

\$80,000. Some interviewees commented that there are few resources immediately available and/or low motivation to reduce utility costs. Two interviewees noticed a sudden increase in their utility bills, but only temporarily (one or two months) before their bills went back down. Only one interviewee was aware of any energy saving measures or programs offered to low-income families that could reduce their utility bills.

*Example anecdotes:*

- One tenant has rent that covers utility costs. Therefore, the tenant was unaware and relatively unconcerned about energy bills or ways to reduce them.
- One tenant is aware of the rebates from switching from gas to electric appliances but expressed no further interest in pursuing them until the landlord would decide whether or not to switch.

*Quote:*

Below are direct quotes from interviewees regarding their utility costs. These quotes capture the personal perspectives of the interviewees.

“I am aware of rebates, from switching from gas to electric appliances. My landlord has not taken the measure yet, but he is interested in changing from gas to electric...My landlord should be the one to take care of figuring out the switch.”

“Disposable income needs to be considered with this trend (electrification), and tenants might not be able to afford the transition. It needs to be affordable.”

“Aplique [a algún programa que se ofrezca a las familias con bajos ingresos para ayudar a reducir las facturas de energía] pero no ve mucho cambio. La hora que PG&E recomienda utilizar la energía, lamentablemente es la hora en la que necesitamos utilizar la energía.”

*translation below*

“I applied [for a program offered to low-income families to help reduce energy bills] but I don’t see much change. The time that PG&E recommends using the energy is unfortunately the time that we need to use the energy.”

## *Health*

Interviewees had split experiences when it came to development of health issues related to the condition of their previous or current housing. Five of the interviewees either personally developed or knew of someone in their building who had developed health issues related to the condition of their previous or current housing. The issues included asthma and other breathing problems such as congestion. Three of the five interviewees noted that their landlords also knew of these health

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(<https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/ACEEE%2C%20Household%20Energy%20Burdens.pdf>). On average, low-income households pay approximately **16.3%** of their total family income towards home energy costs while higher income households pay approximately **3.5%** of their total family income ([https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2018/03/f49/WAP-fact-sheet\\_final.pdf](https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2018/03/f49/WAP-fact-sheet_final.pdf)).

concerns. However, that did not always mean that the landlord tried to fix the issue. The remaining interviewees (four) did not experience any related health issues or know of any neighbors who experienced them.

*Example anecdotes:*

- One tenant developed chronic health problems due to mold, excessive dampness, smoke, and chemicals in previous housing. However, the landlord refused to make any repairs because the rent was considered low. Despite these housing conditions, the tenant did not leave until after being evicted due to a lost rent check.
- A tenant mentioned dust due to construction when first moving in, but after talking with the landlord, the carpet flooring was replaced with interlocking tiles, which reduces the accumulation of dust and dirt.
- A neighbor of the interviewee had difficulty breathing due to smoke from the chimneys in the shared duplex building, but the landlord added air conditioning units in the bedrooms that also filtered the air to prevent further issues.

*Quotes:*

Below are direct quotes from interviewees regarding their health and potential impacts from their housing situation. These quotes capture the personal perspectives of the interviewees.

“My landlord was aware [of the health issues]. His excuse to not make repairs was that the rent was cheap; the price point was 2012- 2015.”

*Education and awareness*

Regarding the desire for further information about the effects of transitioning to electric appliances, all interviewees had some awareness of the trend of moving from gas and fossil fuels to electric appliances. Five interviewees were concerned with the switch and how this transition would affect their utility bills. The rest were unconcerned with the switch. In relation to outreach and education, most interviewees stated that they stayed informed through the news, friends and family, or through social media. Most interviewees expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns through this interview.

The table below categorizes preferred information channels and mediums that were shared during the interview process. The left column contains channels and mediums that were shared by English speakers, and the right column contains input shared by Spanish speakers.

Preferred Information Channels and Mediums	
<p>For English speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nextdoor</li> <li>• Living with the Bay podcast</li> <li>• The Friday Night Drive podcast</li> <li>• Facebook</li> </ul>	<p>For Spanish speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WhatsApp/Facebook</li> <li>• Regular text message</li> <li>• Point Reyes Radio: Nuestro encuentro latino</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LinkedIn</li> <li>• Instagram</li> <li>• Newspapers</li> <li>• Pamphlets</li> <li>• Flyers</li> <li>• Billboards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community events</li> <li>• Chats: Raizes de canal</li> <li>• Novato TV</li> <li>• Directly from CBOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Canal Alliance</li> <li>○ Voces de Canal</li> <li>○ Union de Inquilinos de Canal</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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*Example anecdotes:*

- One interviewee’s landlord gathers all the residents together each month to discuss and resolve any building issues. The landlord has considered switching from gas to electric appliances but wanted to bring this up with everyone first. The tenant sees no issue with the switch as long as the tenant does not need to get involved and the landlord handles everything.
- One interviewee (a person of color) commented that sharing information with BIPOC groups across social media would be useful.
- One interviewee expressed that it felt important to share renter experiences and give advice for the local renter community to support each other when faced with unlawful evictions, rent increases, or other such rental issues.

*Quote:*

Below are direct quotes from interviewees regarding education and awareness of electrification, renter protection laws, and other elements relevant to the building appliance rules. These quotes capture the personal perspectives of the interviewees.

“I learned about this [opportunity] from a friend of mine. I felt like my voice should be heard [to help] my community... Through this interview, I feel like someone cares about my standard of living, and it feels good.”

“My [rental and housing] experience could be helpful for the public. It is important to have a venue to share my experience and other similar experiences with the masses.”