

City fines landlord of Beach Flats units

By **BRIAN SEALS**

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Beach Flats
SANTA CRUZ — A landlord who began jacking up rents in a Beach Flats apartment complex area last year was fined \$15,000 last week for failing to comply with city orders to make repairs and roll back rents.

Victor Rodriguez of Santa Cruz was fined the maximum amount under city law for violations at 204 Riverside Ave. and 129 Raymond St., where he raised the rent by hundreds of dollars — in some cases more than doubling the rent in a year.

In December, Rodriguez was ordered to roll back rents at five units until repairs were made to bring the apartments into compliance with city building codes.

"He never confirmed to us that he had done that," said City Attorney John Barrisone.

Barrisone said the maximum fine was warranted.

"It was just the nature of the violation, and the fact he had been given a chance to rectify them and had not," he said.

He said fines of the maximum amount, \$2,500 per violation, are somewhat unusual, but do happen occasionally.

"It's not common, but it's not unprecedented," Barrisone said.

City law prohibits raising the rent when units are in violation of building code.

Recently, some tenants complained their rents had not been rolled back, prompting the fines.

Rodriguez has 10 days to appeal the fines. He said Tuesday he had no comment when asked about the fines at the complex.

Please see **LANDLORD** on **Page A6**

Landlord

Continued from Page A1

He told the Sentinel in December he planned to spend \$750,000 to refurbish the complex.

The city got involved when residents approached the City Council in December to complain about spiraling rents.

From December 1999 to December 2000, the rent for a studio apartment at the complex rose from \$530 to \$995, said Tamara Sheinkman, who runs a youth program in the Beach Flats area and is a member of a group formed to fight the increases, the 204 Riverside/129 Raymond Tenants Defense Committee.

Rents on other units increased during that same time, with a one-bedroom increasing from \$570 per month to \$1,195 per month.

Inspectors visited the complex in January after a rent rollback had been ordered, and found violations in all 32 units at the complex. The violations ranged from outdated wiring to moldy walls and rotting floors. Rodriguez was fined \$2,500 for failing to complete repairs under that order by a May 17 deadline and \$2,500 for each unit where rents had been ordered rolled back.

Despite the conditions found last winter, a handful of residents Tuesday said their only complaint was the high rent. They said they now were paying \$1,050 per month for a studio.

The landlord had been making various repairs for the past six to nine months, they said, including new roofing, flooring and repaired windows.

"A lot of money for a little space," lamented one man who did not want to be identified.

Yet even with the city bearing down on Rodriguez, Sheinkman said she worries what will happen to people who live there. She said 14 families in the mostly Latino neighborhood have been displaced due to the rent increases.

"The frightening thing to me is, what stops him from raising the rents again?" Sheinkman said.

Contact Brian Seals at
bseals@santa-cruz.com.