

# Excuse me... but is there an **adult in the room?**

My **awful moldy** adventures with the University of Iowa and the Iowa Board of Regents.

OK, so it's bad enough that through incompetency and sloth the University of Iowa's Business Office poisoned me by ignoring a serious water problem in a house they rented to me, but now they've spent three years ducking responsibility and **LYING** to cover their fannies -- even dragging the Iowa Board of Regents into parroting the lies.

I would expect behavior like this from the slumlords of Iowa City who take advantage of uninformed students, but not from an institution that lives off the goodwill of the public, is entrusted to house so many students, and pretends to provide leadership in the fields of public health and civic responsibility.

Since the day I learned I was poisoned to the point of developing a late-in-life mold allergy, I have been seeking an apology and redress from the University of Iowa. I haven't been demanding a lot, just...

- that the University takes full responsibility for the mismanagement of their property
- that I be reimbursed my immediate and future out-of-pocket expenses
- that my stuff -- currently stored in a climate controlled shed -- be restored or replaced
- and that procedures be put into place to insure that no more lives are harmed.

This last point is very important because the University of Iowa's Business Office moved five students into the moldy house without doing a proper remediation the day after I moved out -- even though I had provided them with my doctor's diagnosis and their employee, Cathy Fountain, had been to the house two days earlier to see first-hand the scoopable quantities of mold in the basement.

My quest to find someone with a backbone and a conscience has been fruitless. I have a well-documented trail of useless correspondence with an appallingly large number of people who one would expect by their position to provide oversight and leadership.

- The University Business Office (response: "So sue us!")
- The University Ombudsperson (response: "Sorry, you'll have to sue us.")
- The University Legal Office (response: "So sue us!")

- The University President (response: None. Just the all-to-familiar "deer in the headlights" thing...)
- The State Ombudsperson (response: "Wow! That's not right. Sue 'em.")
- The Iowa Department of Justice (response: "Here's a bone. Go away.")
- The Iowa Board of Regents (see the lies and links below...)
- Several local legislators (response: "We'll talk to someone. Maybe you could write some legislation...")

Something even more dispiriting is the lameness of the lies that have been told from bottom to top.

Every citizen of Iowa should be embarrassed by the following [letter I received from Robert Donley, the Executive Director of the Iowa Board of Regents](#), not only for the blatant fabrications, but for its sheer ineptness... (if you're gonna lie on the behalf of Iowa taxpayers, at least show some creativity and style!)

	<p>"According to the University, you requested approval to move in to the property immediately after the University's purchase in October 2007, leaving virtually no time for the University to evaluate or service the facility."</p>	<p>OK. So the guy does not know that I simply responded to an advertisement, got a walk-through, and signed a lease three days later. Probably didn't ask...</p> <p>But <b>wait a minute?!</b> This oversight agency is unconcerned that their employees are reporting that they allow tenants to FORCE them to rent uninspected, potentially dangerous properties?</p> <p>Show me one landlord in the private sector who can make this claim without snickering...</p>
	<p>"You then lived in the house during one of the wettest periods in Iowa's history culminating with the record floods levels of 2008."</p>	<p>Well, on the face of it, this is true. But apparently no one took the time to check to see if the rest of the neighboring buildings on Iowa City's highest hill -- like the hospital, the Field House, and Kinnick Stadium -- experienced flooding that year (they did not.) Nor is someone representing the Iowa Board of Regents expected to understand that the rainfall that wiped out Iowa City fell in a watershed well north of the town. I guess it might be a stretch to expect such a person to know that the floods started in June, which is, by any measure, a long time after my complaints about clogged gutters and water in my basement started in February.</p> <p>But then we have to ask: is it <b>really OK for a landlord to shrug off poor maintenance and dangerous living conditions for six</b></p>

		<p><b>months</b> because there's a flood nearby? Apparently the Iowa Board of Regents thinks so.</p>
	<p>"The University of Iowa diligently worked with you to address your concerns about the mold in the home..."</p>	<p>If by "diligent" you mean "ignored your complaints for six months and only stopped by to actually visually inspect (and get repulsed by) the mold invasion the day before you moved out", then I have to agree.</p> <p>But I have to ask, given the Board of Regents' awesome powers of oversight, what proofs they considered in making this statement? I, for the life of me, <b>cannot imagine one shred of evidence</b> to support this claim.</p> <p>In my complaint I even presented evidence of lies that a university employee was emailing to her supervisors... yet still this lack of curiosity from the oversight agency? Hmmmm...</p>
	<p>"...including numerous remediation efforts..."</p>	<p>Again... <b>WHAT!??</b> Show me one slip of evidence that the Iowa Board of Regents received from the University of Iowa during their no-doubt responsible investigation that describes a "remediation effort."</p>
	<p>"...and offers of alternative living arrangements which you declined."</p>	<p>OK. Someone's taken <b>WAY TOO MANY psychedelic drugs</b> here. NO SUCH THING ever happened and there's absolutely no way that anyone at the UI can offer any proof of this. It wouldn't be difficult, say a copy of an email or a letter...</p> <p>It appears that, in matters of the Iowa Board of Regents' oversight, the term "responsible" can occasionally be confused with "gullible."</p>
<p>Not actually a</p>	<p>"The University, since 2009, has implemented a process whereby a Phase I inspection is conducted on the property</p>	<p>I've asked for a rule change to allow tenants to call upon <b>third party housing inspectors</b>, like city and county health officials, to inspect Regents rentals -- just as they can call local police and fire services - - since the Iowa Board of Regents are demonstrably incapable of</p>



but I don't have  
a  
"disingenuous"  
image.

prior to purchase. In addition,  
an environmental audit is  
conducted on all properties  
prior to rental and includes an  
inspection for asbestos, lead,  
mold/indoor air quality and  
radon."

providing adequate oversight.

This ploy by the university and the Iowa Board of Regents pretends  
that the problems existed at the time the property was purchased.

When I walked through this lovely home prior to renting it, there was  
no indication of water infiltration or mold growth.

It was nine months of **MISERABLE MAINTENANCE** and **blithely  
ignoring tenant complaints** that caused the problem.

So, instead of biting the bullet and saying, "yeah, we screwed up and  
we want to adopt measures that protect the people living in our  
properties", the university and the Iowa Board of Regents prefer to  
keep operating outside the legal parameters that every other Iowa  
landlord must obey.

So, my fellow citizen of Iowa, this is how it works.

The University of Iowa and the Iowa Board of Regents can screw things up and damage someone's health. Stuff happens. That's the cost of doing business. But instead of saying, "Sorry. Let us help to make things right", they will stonewall, lie, and drag discussions out in the hope that you will eventually drop the matter. Barring that, my counselors tell me, they will make a bargain on the courthouse steps for the few intrepid individuals who demand justice.

Meanwhile, they retain the right to police their own behavior. It's **the fox guarding the hen house**.

Years ago, where the University Business Office could have cleaned out some gutters and installed a sump pump for \$2,000, they caused irreparable harm to my health. Where they could have apologized, cleaned up my stuff, changed a couple policies, and provided better oversight to their operations, they chose to lie and cause me further grief and economic harm.

Worse yet, the agency charged with oversight is perfectly willing and able to ignore a credible complaint from a credible citizen and instead play along with the **legal denial game** their hack attorneys advise. It's a shame. As far as I can tell,

there is no adult in this room.

Yeah, I'm going to have to sue the institution. But at the same time, I want everyone who cares to know that the University of Iowa and the Iowa Board of Regents stoop to this sort of disreputable behavior for the sake a few bucks.

Viewed from any angle, it's simply poor stewardship.

-- Cliff Missen

### **LINKS:**

[Letter from Robert Donley, the Executive Director of the Iowa Board of Regents](#)

[Letter from Iowa's Department of Justice denying my claim.](#)

[Way too many details about my experience at 219 Melrose Court \(including the gruesome photos...\)](#)

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