

# 'Beautiful and modern' apartment building has rash of problems, tenants say

Homestead Land Holdings declined to respond 'due to privacy concerns'



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Three tenants of The Duchess, a newly constructed highrise apartment building west of Ottawa's core, say they're dealing with several issues management has allegedly failed to address including unsafe units, unclean spaces and appliances that simply don't work. Officials with Homestead Land Holdings, who run the building, declined CBC's requests for an interview to address a detailed list of allegations, citing privacy considerations and ongoing litigation at the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Tenants of a newly constructed highrise apartment building west of Ottawa's core say they're living in a "nightmare" because of several issues management has allegedly failed to address including unsafe units, unclean spaces and appliances that simply don't work.

The building is run by Homestead Land Holdings, a landlord based in Kingston, Ont., which owns nearly 30 apartment buildings in Ottawa and many more across Ontario.

Three tenants of The Duchess, located at 833 Richmond Rd., near Woodroffe Avenue, agreed to share their experiences with CBC.

All said they've experienced numerous issues since moving in a year ago, ranging from poorly constructed units to broken HVAC systems and improper waste disposal in common washrooms.

They said numerous complaints raised with Homestead have never been appropriately addressed by building management.

"I'm completely uncomfortable here to be honest," said Krystina Morneau, who claims she was seriously injured this summer because of an improperly installed door frame in her unit.



An aerial shot of The Duchess, a new highrise by Homestead Land Holdings Ltd. at 833 Richmond Rd., west of Ottawa's core. (Homestead.ca)

Homestead officials declined CBC's requests for an interview to address a detailed list of allegations.

"Due to privacy considerations and ongoing litigation at the Landlord and Tenant Board initiated by Homestead, we are unable to comment on your inquiry," wrote chief operating officer Martin Woodstock.

Homestead did not elaborate on the details of those disputes. Most previous rulings at the tribunal [have been regarding rental arrears](#).

## **'Disgusting' showers, broken appliances**

The Duchess is described as a "beautiful and modern" apartment with in-suite laundry, central air conditioning and a number of amenities including a pool, according to Homestead's website.

Rent begins at \$1,950 a month for a one-bedroom unit and \$2,470 for two bedrooms.

All three tenants who spoke with CBC said they liked the allure of a new building and moved in just a few months after it had been built.

Morneau said she quickly noticed some cosmetic imperfections in her unit after moving in: streaky paint, cracked drywall and spots on the bathroom tiles.

Chris Kennedy, who shares a two-bedroom unit with his ill mother, said he was horrified by what they discovered in the showers by the pool — workers had poured what he described as "fetid, disgusting gunk" full of "hair and trash and debris" down the drains and continue to do so.



A picture of the shower drains in the washroom next to the pool. Tenant Chris Kennedy says this is an ongoing issue in the building. (Submitted by Chris Kennedy) Morley Thompson said he's had ongoing problems with the HVAC system in his unit: his apartment is consistently too hot, too cold or the air conditioning doesn't work at all.

The fan in his bathroom also doesn't work and the floorboards in his living room have begun to rot, he said.

"Who would think all these issues would happen in a brand new building? But it just started deteriorating," Thompson said.

## **Tenant says arm 'ripped' open by door frame**

Morneau's biggest complaint rests with her door frames.

The tenant said she was doing laundry in her unit earlier this summer when she slashed the back of her right arm on an improperly installed door striker — the metal plate on a door frame designed to catch the latch of a door handle.



Krystina Morneau says an improperly installed door striker led to a gash on her arm, requiring seven stitches. (Submitted by Krystina Morneau)

The ones in Morneau's unit don't sit flush against the frame, but instead jut out, leaving about a half-inch of sharp metal exposed.

"I heard [my arm] rip like a shirt," she said.

Morneau, who was alone with her two children at the time, ended up going to the hospital where she received seven stitches.

"I was very stressed because I knew that they were too long," she said of the door strikers. "I had already ripped some clothing on it."

## **Issues unresolved, say tenants**

Despite all three tenants raising these issues with Homestead management — they say numerous times — there has been no resolution, they said.

After Morneau cut her arm, she immediately sent an email with photos to Homestead, which CBC has seen.

Morneau said the landlord apologized and immediately offered to come remove the door strikers, but never at a time when she would be home. Months later, the door frame is status quo.

In the meantime, Morneau has placed makeshift covers made of tissue and tape over the door strikers.

"My children are at height level for these wall strikers. So if they're running around, they can easily just crack their head open with it, it's that sharp," she said.

When Kennedy tried to raise the bathroom issue with Homestead employees, he said they told him "Where else are they going to dump it?"

Thompson said he has sent numerous emails to Homestead officials but received few responses. On the occasion workers have come to look at the issues, he feels the problems remain unresolved.



Tenant Morley Thompson says he's had ongoing issues with the air conditioning in his unit. (Nicole Williams/CBC)

Morneau, Thompson and Kennedy said it's all taken a toll and they are calling on the landlord to do better.

"When you're actively choosing to invest in something that's supposed to be a higher standard of living and you're not receiving it, it's just a tremendous failure on their part," said Kennedy.

"I need them to step up to the plate and deliver what they're offering."

Morneau said she'll look for a new apartment in the spring.

Thompson said he's also considering a move but most of all, he wants the landlord to be held accountable.