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Renters in foreclosed buildings get a break

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Drugs and dead animals, barricades and biker gangs -- Cook County sheriff's deputies executing forcible eviction orders have run into bizarre and dangerous situations.

Recently, they've encountered a new type of disturbing scenario -- renters who are learning for the first time from an eviction crew that they are living in a building in foreclosure.

Today, members of the sheriff's eviction team will be trained on new procedures designed to stop eviction of renters from buildings in foreclosure.

"We're trying to make sure people are not being taken advantage of," said Kevin Connelly, Cook County chief deputy sheriff.

Sheriff's deputies execute about 100 eviction calls daily, Connelly said. Not all evictions are related to foreclosures, but since record numbers of properties have fallen into foreclosure, evictions are rising.

Starting today, deputies who enter homes where no one is present will hold off for seven days, leaving a brightly colored sign on the door to let renters know they have a week to provide proof of occupancy.

If the tenants prove they are living there as renters, the eviction will be called off, Connelly said. In the past, if no one was home, the eviction would take place.

Quite often, Connelly said, renters don't know the building is in foreclosure until sheriff's deputies arrive to execute an eviction order.

Shannon Weiss, co-owner of the Center for Renter's Rights in Chicago, said the office receives calls every day from people who just found out the building they rented in was in foreclosure.

"It's worse for the tenants than it is for the owners," Weiss said. "The owners made their own mess. The tenants are just helpless victims."

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