



March 23, 2020

Multifamily Industry Responds to Coronavirus Pandemic

Read more about how owners and operators are protecting both residents and employees.

By [Christine Serlin](#)

Adobe Stock



The multifamily housing industry is mobilizing to help residents and employees as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak continues to escalate nationwide.

Property owners and managers across the nation are putting plans in place to assist their residents on several fronts, starting with increased communication

about how they are responding to the crisis and information about CDC protocol for staying safe.

“This is obviously a time when residents are understandably concerned and anxious and need guidance on how to best protect themselves and others around them,” says Marcie Williams, president of RKW Residential, a Charlotte, N.C., firm that oversees 20,000 apartments throughout the Southeast. “They are leaning heavily on the managers and staff on the ground at our respective communities to provide such guidance and help put them at ease.”

Williams says RKW managers are updating residents daily via email and responding immediately to questions and concerns sent through the resident online portals.

“We are over-communicating with our residents through text message, email, letters, and flyers,” says David Lynd, CEO of San Antonio-based LYND, a privately held, national real estate company responsible for approximately 23,000 apartment units in 11 states. “We want to make sure that everyone gets the message and understands what we are trying to do to protect them.”

Houston-based Morgan Group, which has 34 multifamily properties with 11,000 units nationwide, has typically communicated with residents through its mobile platform but is taking extra measures.

“In this unprecedented situation we want to be sure we’re reaching each and every resident so we took the extra step of printed materials in common and high-traffic areas—lobbies, elevators, hallways, etc.,” says Joe Melton, vice president of marketing and management support services.

Kairoi Residential, a multifamily investment, development, and property management company headquartered in San Antonio, also is in constant communication with its staff, with a weekly all-hands call to help guide its

associates through the crisis and an Executive Crisis Team composed of major departments that play a role in the daily operations and lives of both associates and residents. “We have daily early morning calls to help craft that day’s activities and communication,” says Kari Warren, executive vice president of operations.

In addition to communication, the firms are taking additional steps, including increased technology, canceling events, and closing common areas, for increased protection for staff and residents.

“We have reduced our staff size and office hours and are practicing social distancing,” says Melton. “We’re fortunate to interact with our residents in a mostly paperless environment, so we’re able to continue our business without person-to-person contact with residents and vendors. Additionally, to protect both our staff and our residents, we’ve limited our maintenance team’s work orders to an emergency-only basis so they have more time to focus on sanitizing the highest traffics areas of our buildings with increased frequency.”

He adds that its team is also making sure residents and prospects have access to information to make it easier for them to practice social distancing, such as how-to videos on common maintenance issues for residents and virtual tours for prospects.

Williams says RKW also has formalized cleaning and sanitization protocols for teams at individual properties and has vendors that can handle additional cleaning. If a resident or staff member would test positive for the coronavirus, she adds that the firm will work closely with local health department authorities and notify all residents at the community, without sharing private details, and explain additional measures that are being implemented.

As for residents whose jobs are being affected by the coronavirus pandemic, several of the firms are prepared to work with those individuals.

“We are being very thoughtful as to what will make the greatest impact to our residents’ individual situations—waiving late fees and amenity fees just to name a few,” says Kairoi’s Warren. “Our goal is to weather this storm with our residents and come out the other side stronger than before.”

Regarding rent payments and assistance, Williams says RKW will work with renters as situations arise and are deferring to the courts, which have been taking action to halt pending cases and hold off on processing any new cases for the next 30 to 90 days.

“With proof of job loss, we will stay evictions and park the debt until the market recovers,” adds Lynd.