

What does a Code Officer do (and what can't they do)?

The Code Enforcement Officer in a municipality is charged with numerous duties. These include occupancy inspections, building inspections, upholding the property maintenance code (IPMC), issuing building permits, and other duties. To be a Code enforcement Officer you must go through continual training, have knowledge of public safety, building codes and the municipal codes that govern your municipality (local, county, and state). A Code Enforcement Officer must be able to work with all other departments in the municipality.

Most people think of the code officer as the person who cites you for high grass or other property maintenance violations. They do indeed perform that function. They also assist residents with internal inspections to assure that the home or building has the required safety features such as working ground fault outlets (GFI/GFCI) that are required near sinks and other potentially wet areas, smoke & carbon monoxide detectors, and other building standards.

Munhall maintains standards for how the Code Enforcement Officer conducts inspections and handles violations. The normal process for a property maintenance violation is:

1. Issue a "door knocker" card requesting compliance with the violation.

If there is no response in 5 days or the requested action is not taken –

2. Issue a letter requesting same action.

Property owner is generally given 10-14 days from the date of mailing to comply. If they do not resolve the issue –

3. Issue a citation, which includes a fine.

When a citation is issued it is filed through the Magistrate's office. The property owner will be sent a summons and the case will be heard in front of the Magistrate. The timeframe between the filing and the hearing may be up to 6 months depending on the Court's caseload. The ruling may be to dismiss the case, continue the case, or find the person guilty and issue a fine to be paid.

If found guilty by the Magistrate, a defendant may appeal to the Court of Common Pleas.

The courts will not arrest someone for failure to comply with a property maintenance violation or a failure to pay.

The duties of a code enforcement officer may vary depending on the jurisdiction and specific regulations, but generally, their responsibilities include:

1. Property Inspections: Conducting routine inspections of properties to ensure compliance with zoning regulations, building codes, property maintenance standards, and other relevant ordinances.
2. Investigations: Responding to complaints from residents or local authorities regarding potential violations, such as illegal construction, unsafe structures, excessive noise, and improper land use.

3. Documentation: Maintaining detailed records of inspections, investigations, and enforcement actions, including photographs and written reports, to document violations and the steps taken to address them.
4. Communication: Interacting with property owners, tenants, developers, and the public to explain regulations, provide guidance on compliance, and answer questions about codes and ordinances.
5. Issuing Notices and Citations: If violations are identified, code enforcement officers may issue warnings, notices of violation, and citations to property owners or occupants, outlining the specific violations and the necessary corrective actions.
6. Enforcement Actions: Enforcing compliance through a range of actions, such as imposing fines, requesting corrective measures, initiating legal proceedings, and even seeking court orders to address chronic or severe violations.
7. Collaboration: Collaborating with other local government departments, such as planning, health, and public safety, to address cross-disciplinary issues that impact community well-being.
8. Record Keeping: Maintaining accurate and up-to-date records of all enforcement activities, which can be used for reporting, legal proceedings, and future reference.
9. Continual Training: Keeping up with changes in regulations and codes through ongoing training and professional development to ensure accurate and effective enforcement practices.

Overall, code enforcement officers play a crucial role in upholding community standards, fostering responsible development, and maintaining the overall quality of life for residents. Their work contributes to the safety, aesthetics, and functionality of neighborhoods and municipalities.