You’ve just moved into your new rowhome, and once or twice a week you take your household trash out back like everyone else. But your neighbors tell you that you are breaking the law. Why?

Many students don’t realize that there are laws in Baltimore about proper disposal of household garbage. Students often learn the hard way when the city enforces the rule by handing down hefty fines ranging from $25 to $500. The following is a quick guide to handling your trash:

• Your trash bags must be placed in an outdoor garbage can with a tightly-fitting lid - ideally a metal can. Rats will tear open plastic bags and get into cans without lids to get to their food source. This causes two more problems. It supports the rat population and torn bags cause trash to be strewn around the streets. Help control the rat population, keep our community clean, and obey the law by placing your garbage bags in trash cans with secure lids.

• Always put your household garbage in garbage bags.

• Put your garbage cans in the proper place the night before your scheduled trash pick-up.

• Periodically inspect and clean the area where you put your garbage cans.

To find out when your trash and recycling collection days are and where you need to put your cans for pick up, call 311. To find out more about city ordinances and fines, check out: cityservices.baltimorecity.gov/charterandcodes

If you have something larger than everyday household trash you will need to contact the City to schedule a bulk trash pick up. They will take up to three items for free once a month. Contact 311 for more information to schedule a bulk trash pick up.

To learn more about the Department of Public Works, check out: ci.baltimore.md.us/government/dpw/index.html
WHILE YOU ARE STILL LOOKING AROUND

Ask around first. Talk to other students who live in the areas you are interested in and get their opinions. If possible, meet the current residents of the houses you are interested in and ask them about the neighbors.

Try to find out the ratio of student residents to non-student residents. Students often keep very different hours than non-students, and this can be disruptive to everyone.

Remember that many of your potential neighbors have lived in the area for a long time, and some are very sensitive about living next door to students. If you plan to live with roommates, be certain that they are people who share your lifestyle and are people you can trust.

ONCE YOU HAVE NARROWED YOUR CHOICES

Ask to look at a lease ahead of time. Many buildings have strict rules that apply to all tenants, so make certain that these are rules you can live by.

If possible, talk to the people who live near the house you are considering. Do they keep the same hours as you? Will their activities disturb you? Will your activities disturb them? Remember, once you sign a lease, you are going to have to live near them for a long time.

If you have a car, check around the area to see if it has adequate parking. Many streets have very restricted parking zones. Some streets have lanes which are cleared every morning or evening for rush hour traffic. If you park on the street, make certain you are familiar with any restrictions so that you don’t get any tickets, or worse, get towed. Consider getting a resident parking permit from the city. To do so, visit: http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/government/parking/permits.html

Most importantly, pay careful attention to the safety of the neighborhood and the building! Check with both the police department and the Campus Police about the level of crime in the surrounding area. Make certain that the house can be completely secured and ask when the locks were last changed.

READY TO SIGN?

Read the lease! You need to be certain that you can abide by everything you are signing your name to. A lease is a legally binding contract.

Be sure to ask which utilities you will be responsible for paying. Be prepared to pay a fee to turn on the utilities. If you are sharing an apartment with roommates, decide ahead of time how much each of you will contribute. The person whose name is on the bill is ultimately responsible for payment no matter what agreement your group has.

Renting a row home is different from renting an apartment. Understand that you may be responsible for more maintenance, and be certain that you have an understanding with your landlord about who will be responsible for supplying garbage cans, mowing the grass, raking the leaves, shoveling the snow, and so forth. If you are the one responsible, be prepared to purchase any tools you will need.

The city of Baltimore will issue citations for improper yard maintenance and trash disposal. If you are responsible for these things, the landlord has the right to pass these fines on to you.

In addition, the Student Code of Conduct requires students to abide by the local codes. Make certain you know when and how to dispose of your trash. Trash must be placed in bags and the bags must be in cans with tightly-fitting lids the night before your scheduled pick up. Check with your landlord about when and where you should leave the cans.

MOVING IN

Introduce yourself to your neighbors. Meet the people who live on both sides of your house, and give them a way to contact you should they have any concerns. If you know there are going to be evenings when you plan to have friends over, consider notifying your neighbors ahead of time. Always be courteous. It is better to have a neighbor contact you when he is upset than for him to contact the police or the landlord.

If you plan on installing something in your house, be certain that it is acceptable to the landlord first. Structural changes, even small holes, can be very costly for you when your lease is up.

Stay safe! Always lock your doors. Do not invite strangers into your house. Never prop the building doors open. Consider having a residential security survey of your house. You can call the Baltimore City Police department at 410-367-8491 to schedule an appointment to conduct the survey. A trained police officer will check doors, windows and locks and make suggestions for improving security. You can then discuss these recommendations with your landlord.

Keep in mind that the property owner or a representative has the right to enter your house even when you are not there but must give you 24 hours notice, except in the event of an emergency.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

...ENJOY! You are now officially living on your own. Make the most of it!

If you have any questions or problems there are several places to go for assistance:

Jonathan Walter
Student/Community Liaison, JHU
443-240-4196 - liaison@jhu.edu
For assistance with city, neighbor and neighborhood concerns

Off-Campus Housing Office
Wolman Hall, Room 102 - 410-516-7961
For assistance with landlord issues and referrals to city agencies as well as general information about life off-campus.

Listings for available rentals are online at jhu.edu/hds/offcampus.