

## City Sues US Bank Over Failure To Maintain Foreclosed Properties

By Danny Lee  
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Amos Hartston, an attorney at Los Angeles' Inner City Law Center, a legal firm specializing in housing issues, said some clients have come to him with concerns about foreclosed homes in their neighborhoods dealing with issues like mold, plumbing and ventilation.

"There are a lot of infestations of vermin such as rats, insects, roaches, bedbugs," Hartston said. "Those problems get worse in the summer so expect it to get worse now with the heat."

Which is why he supported the city's decision to pursue legal action against a major bank for the second time in over a year. The city sued US Bank on Monday, accusing the nation's fifth largest commercial bank of allowing foreclosed homes that it owns to deteriorate. The complaint claimed that US Bank had "become one of the largest slumlords in the city of Los Angeles" and ordered the Minneapolis-based company to make sure its properties meet city and state building codes.

"I applaud the city attorney for taking action because this is a real problem in the city of Los Angeles," Hartston said of the civil lawsuit brought forth by City Attorney Carmen Trutanich.

The city of LA went after Deutsche Bank last year when alleged crimes such as vagrancy, prostitution and drug possession were reported at several Deutsche-owned properties. The complaint against US Bank called into question the lending company's handling



*US Bank is the second bank to be sued by the city in over a year.  
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of more than 1,500 foreclosed properties throughout the LA area.

"These are innocent victims of the foreclosure crisis," Hartston said. "Their homes are falling into disrepair because the property owners are not keeping them up according to building code and safety standards. Dozens of these properties have tenants living in them that pay their rent and are law-abiding citizens."

US Bank is accused of unlawfully increasing rent and attempting to evict tenants under the 90-day notice period. Hartston said low-income tenants are most affected by the substandard living conditions when the bank failed to maintain property that it owned.

"We see misinformation given to tenants about their rights and attempts at illegal evictions by the banks after foreclosure," Hartston said.

The bank released a written statement saying that it is not to blame for

substandard conditions at the foreclosed properties, stating that other loan servicing companies should be held responsible.

"Like the city attorney, we are troubled by properties that are not maintained, which have a corrosive impact on neighborhoods and communities," US Bank Senior Vice President Tom Joyce said in the statement, according to the LA Times.

Accumulation of trash and debris, hazardous electrical wiring, swimming pools with dirty water and inoperative smoke detectors were some of the common problems cited at the more than 150 US Bank-owned properties that were considered substandard, according to the lawsuit.

"Because of the properties that are not maintained after foreclosure, they've fallen into serious disrepair and there are real health and safety issues," Hartston said. "That's the focus that we have and why we support that action has been taken to make sure foreclosed properties are maintained for the tenants."

As of March 31, more than 362,000 homes in California have either been foreclosed or had owners fall behind on payments, according to the LA Times.