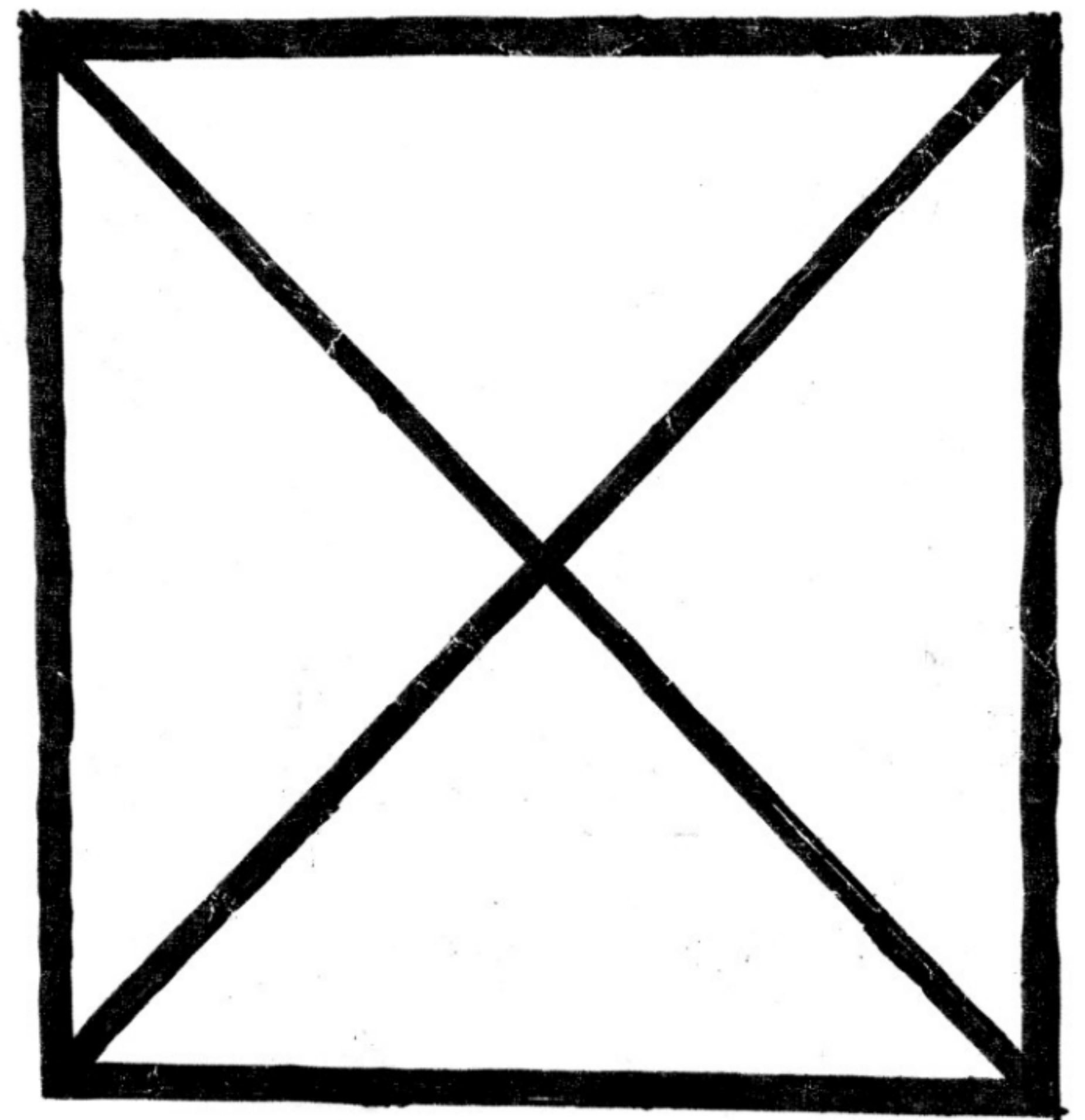




SURVIVAL
WITHOUT
RENT

SURVIVAL WITHOUT RENT III

This is a 2020 republishing of the zine Survival Without Rent. We have decided to republish this zine not only because it is a wonderful document of the “hay-day of NYC squatting”, but also because it has been absolutely invaluable in our experience squatting in New York.

This book was originally published in 1986. It was revised and expanded in 1989 and now in 2020. This book is intended to help people take back the homes that have been taken away from them by government and business. This guide is dedicated to Eleanor Bumpurs, to the East Fifth Street Squat, to Sissy Squat aka Asbestos-It-Gets (2015-2018), and to all who lived there.

- INTRODUCTION -

1. HOW TO FORM A GROUP	PAGE 8
2. FINDING A BUILDING	PAGE 11
3. GETTING IN.....	PAGE 16
4. MOVING IN.....	PAGE 22
5. EMERGENCY REPAIRS.....	PAGE 25
6. LIGHT, HEAT AND FIRE SAFETY.....	PAGE 35
7. MAKESHIFT TOILETS.....	PAGE 43
8. UTILITIES.....	PAGE 46
9. LEGAL HASSLES.....	PAGE 60
10. SECURITY.....	PAGE 67

everyone who stays there as guests fully understands all of this. Make it as hard as possible for anyone to get you out. Make the landlord go through every step of the long and expensive eviction procedure and put up resistance to the very end. Being able to quietly demonstrate that it will be hell to get you out, while speaking kindly and rationally to the landlord will buy you the most time.

RESOURCES:

The Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space (MoRUS) is located at 155 Avenue C in the Lower East side. It is in the ground floor of “C-squat” - a legendary punk squat turned co-op. It’s a good place to learn your history, and maybe even get some advice. Open 11-7 Tuesday and Thursday-Sunday (closed Monday and Wednesday) (973) 818-8495 or (646) 340-8341

Legal

- *Nine-Tenths of the Law: Property and Resistance in the United States* by Hannah Dobbz is a great book with detailed legal advice and tactics on squatting. It can be bought from AK Press (<https://www.akpress.org/nine-tenths-of-the-law-e-book.html>) or found at MoRUS, and maybe even Blue Stockings (feminist/radical book store) on Allen and Stanton in Manhattan.

- Check out the housing court website to read the law more in depth (<http://nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/>)

- Right to Council is the org that advocated to have all tenants be able to have a free lawyer in eviction cases (<https://www.righttocounselnyc.org/>)

Building Research

- Who Owns What: <https://whoownswhat.justfix.nyc>

- ACRIS: <https://a836-acris.nyc.gov/>

- DEPT BUILDING BIS/DOB: <http://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb>

- NYC TAX MAPS: <http://gis.nyc.gov/taxmap/map.htm>

Repairs and Security

- Dept. of Sanitation <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/contact/collection-request-for-large-items>

- Ugly’s electrical guide: <https://www.uglys.net/>

Suggested YouTube Searches:

- “Forceable entry fire dept”

- “lock bypass”

- “Break and Enter - Rompiendo Puertas” - Made by the Newsreel collective in New York City, this film shows “Operation Move-in,” in which Puerto Rican and Dominican families actively reclaimed unused, vacant housing on Manhattan’s Upper West Side.

- “Your House is Mine” - A documentary about the history of squatting in the lower east side of Manhattan from the early 1980’s to 2004.

other instructions in case on arrest. Make a list of the most important belongings that people want taken out of their rooms; it's a good idea to keep it all in one bag or crate. Give this list to your friend. If you have a bad interaction with someone who you think might have called the cops or the landlord, it's a good to have a lockdown plan. Being ready for a conflict and handling it well can go a long way.

Make sure you have a plan to respond to threats before they happen. Talk about to what lengths you're willing to go to in order to defend the house. Be aware of consequences and retaliation of certain actions. Make a plan of who will do what. People tend to have different levels of risk that they are comfortable with. Having roles can be helpful. As soon as you hear someone trying to break in, know who will run down to talk to the person and explain to them your rights as occupants. Know who will put down the barricades, who will film, and who will make sure the rest of the house is secure. When defending your house from an eviction, it is important that everyone has each other's backs, and that everyone is equally committed to the defense of the house. An eviction attempt can be scary and intimidating. One of the hardest things can just be having confidence and heart to stand your ground. If someone in the house is freaking out and saying they are just going to walk out the front door and run, it can crumble the resolve of the rest of the squatters to hold down the house. Make sure that people who are more at risk of mistreatment by the police are protected first, that everyone is on the same page, and that you support each other and help each other to stand strong and push back against losing your home.

In our experience, bad dynamics between roommates have threatened and gotten houses evicted more often than neighbors or cops. Make sure that you have solid communication and that you make agreements about what you will and won't do and stick to them with no exceptions. One important rule is who has keys and who is allowed over, make sure that everyone in the house talks before keys get handed-off to someone new. Never let anyone you don't know into your house. NEVER LET ANYONE IN. Never leave the door unlocked, even for a second. Make the house as much of a fortress as possible. Make sure

INTRODUCTION

The housing situation in NYC rapidly becomes worse and worse. Abandoned buildings deteriorate with every winter. Low income housing and homesteading programs have disappeared along with our elected officials' promises. Now is the time to take the situation into our own hands. What we're saying is that housing policy is dishonest and an insult to anyone living in shelters, crowded conditions, or on the street. These laws are put together by people who can only be described as common criminals who wear nice clothes and live in two or three nice homes. They would never dream of living in the conditions that we are used to. These people profit off our misery. They don't have a grain of sympathy for us, our children, or the sometimes unbearable conditions in which we are forced to live. This little book has been put together to help people with little or no money find a solution to their housing problems. We hope that after reading it, people will look at an abandoned building in a totally new light.

We will go through a step-by-step guide on how to find your building, what to look for, and the cheapest and easiest ways of making it comfortable. Once you are in the building, you will have to deal with the law eventually, so we have included a section covering some basics to keep the police from messing you up. We aim to show methods that you can use to live more comfortably and safely than on the street. We believe that - even if you have no money at all and don't want to have anything to do with other people - you will still find the ideas in this book useful. It may be less work - and in some ways more comfortable - to live in a shelter. However, we believe that if you can manage to take an empty building, you will have a home with more self-respect and more independence than just about anyone. You can get off the street or out of the shelter and make a decent home for yourself very simply. If you do, we hope that you will use whatever political, legal, or other means you can to keep the powers-that-be from making you homeless again. Mayor Koch once said, "if you can't afford to live here, you should get out". Let's give him [and his successors] our answer:

We're taking our homes for ourselves, here. Koch and his cronies can take it or leave it.

In 2020, real-estate is the life blood of this city. You are hard-pressed to find a building worth less than half a million dollars. The NYPD is more powerful than ever and is increasingly concerned with attacking people who in any way threaten the well-to-do's claim on the city. The status quo is maintained by forced evictions, locals that bought property while the getting was good, and the compliance of gentrifiers flooding into the city. The stark reality is that according to Coalition for the Homeless, "in January 2020, there were 62,679 homeless people, including 14,682 homeless families with 22,013 homeless children, sleeping each night in the New York City municipal shelter system. Families make up more than two-thirds of the homeless shelter population... Each night thousands of unsheltered homeless people sleep on New York City streets, in the subway system, and in other public spaces. There is no accurate measurement of New York City's unsheltered homeless population, and recent City surveys significantly underestimate the number of unsheltered homeless New Yorkers". The average rent was over \$3000 for a two-bedroom apartment. Most tenants in NYC spend the majority of their income on paying rent to the building owner.

Many people look at squatting as a thing of the past. The city has sold almost all of its property to developers. In 2020, it's extremely difficult to find a government building that is abandoned, but that doesn't mean that squatting is no longer viable. Rather, it requires a creative approach and a willingness to take risks. Now, there are very few buildings in NYC no one at all wants. Finding the right building is crucial and it may take you a few tries. You have to be ready to face opposition to the state, banks, landlords, neighbors, management companies, developers and sometimes even your peers. Don't get discouraged. Be creative in what you consider viable in a space. Squatting is not necessarily easier than paying rent. Rather than an economy of money, it is an economy of risk. Each group and person will find their own relationship to squatting. You can use the information in this book

Eviction Defense/Response:

If you are squatting, you must be prepared for an eviction. Get together as a house and plan what to do in case of an eviction, as well as other kinds of threats. Figure out what different approaches the people trying to evict you will take. Many banks and landlords hire property management companies or a single person to keep an eye on the building. Sometimes, these companies will leave a sign-in sheet by the door. Sometimes, all they do is check the outside of the building and leave. That's why it is important to not make drastic or visible changes right away. Try to just replace cylinders or get the same model locks. Figure out if anyone is watching your building and try to figure out how often they come around. Try to buy as much time as possible before they figure out you're there and plan what to do and say if this person confronts you. Some people who manage buildings or work for landlords want to avoid trouble, and if they see that you are responsible and that all you want is a place to live, they may let you be, or work with you, or just ignore you. That could be the same with construction workers, and even the owner of the building. If a neighbor calls 911, the police are obligated to show up. If a neighbor calls 311, depending on the nature of the complaint, it could be referred to the cops or to a city official like a building inspector.

Sit down at your first house meeting and make a plan for eviction. Figure out who you think will try to evict you, and how they will try. Do research on the building and the owner and find out as much as you can. Everyone in the house should be on the same page and have the same approach, knowing what to say and what not to say to neighbors, landlords, city officials, and police. Print out a list of eviction procedures and laws that protect you and have it close to the door. Make sure everyone in the house has mail and knows where it is. It's best to only have close friends who you trust know where you live. Have friends of yours who don't live with you, but want to help out, come over to the house. Make sure they know the layout of the house and everyone who lives there. A trustworthy friend should know everyone's legal name and have phone numbers those people want contacted and

people who insist on knowing details about your house. Keep the exact location secret. Tell people the neighborhood only, or even the neighborhood over. There is rarely any benefit in divulging information, and instead, a large risk. Loose lips sink ships. Depending on your situation, it may be a good idea to have a phone tree. A phone tree is something older squats have used to quickly mobilize a lot of supporters to help intervene in an eviction.

Dealing With Neighbors:

Sometimes it's best to not tip-off anyone to the fact that you are staying somewhere, especially in the early stages of a house before you have mail, or before the house is fixed up enough to look like you actually live there (the sleeper month). If you don't want to have to deal with trusting your neighbors to not call the cops on you, only go in and out of your house once a day. It's best to leave early before people go to work, school, and out to run morning errands. Before 6 is the safest. When coming home, wait for the cover of night. After 11 is safest. Avoid rush hours and times people are hanging out outside. Be the last person to leave a subway stop, stay aware of parked cars, and make sure no one is in them. Stay alert and learn to closely observe your surroundings. Police are trained in surveillance and often target squatters. Listen for your neighbor's schedule if you can hear them through the walls. They can hear you.

If you are being clandestine with your house, it will be important that no light gets out the windows, but also that the appearance of the windows doesn't drastically change (both in the front and back of the house). Use minimal light, and angle it away from the window. Check from the outside to make sure no light gets out. Use normal looking blinds backed with black plastic from trash bags or something light-tight. If you're hanging mailboxes, try to make it subtle; get the smallest mailbox you can, and glue or screw it in a place that looks natural. Maybe make the mail box look weathered so it doesn't stand out as brand new.

for anything from a crash pad for when times are rough, to a political tactic embedded in a broader struggle, to a viable and long-term housing solution. Remember to be creative. Squatting doesn't have to look a certain way. As financial and political uncertainty rises, there is a very high chance that we will see squatting become not only more possible, but more necessary.

We hope that this guide can continue to be adapted and passed-on!



THE FLUSHING:

The arm that runs horizontal should be a 4x4 or doubled up 2x4's. The vertical part can be made up of any decent sized wood screwed securely to the horizontal arm. Brace this joint with diagonal pieces and plywood. The barricade should be placed securely under the doorknob. And braced either against stairs, or a piece of wood or angle iron bolted securely to the ground. The flushing can be slid towards the hinged side of the door to allow the door to be opened. For inward swinging doors only.

THE OL' BOY:

Must buy or make some type of bracket to hold a 2x4. Make sure large bolts are used to secure the brackets and they are sunk into something strong and secure. This barricade works well in conjunction with some of the other barricades shown. This can be used on outward swinging doors but the brackets must be secured to the door not the doorframe or wall.

THE BIRD COOP:

Find an old piece of bed frame, or shelving with a section with holes drilled in the manner shown. Cut it to length with an angle grinder or hack saw. Find long screws or screws and washers that are sized so that they fit through the larger hole drilled in the metal but can not pass through the smaller hole. Hold up the piece of metal to the door and mark where the holes are. Drill the screws into the door and the wall next to the door where you have marked. Leave the heads of the screws sticking out and inch or so. Place the piece of the bed frame on the screws and slide it over so it can not pull off, tighten the screws down so that the metal is held securely but can still be easily placed over the door. Make sure that what ever the screws are sunk into its strong, and secure. This barricade is convenient and small however not the most secure and best used in conjunction with another barricade or strong lock or latch. This can be used on inward or outward swinging doors.

THE STOMPER:

Made out of a short section of wide solid wood, such as wood from scaffold, a police barricade, or a floor joist, and a 4x4 or 2x4 on the top the

length of the door. Brace one side against something solid on the floor such as a threshold, or a piece of lumber or metal bolted to the ground. The barricade must rest at less than a 45 degree angle to the ground. Once in place it can be stomped on to be secured. This barricade is only used for inward swinging doors.

THE TITANUM DAN:

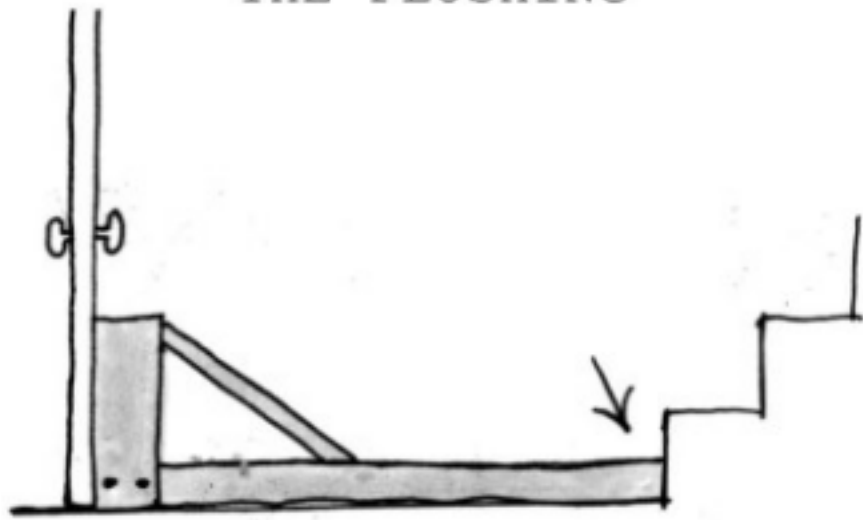
This is a barricade for stairways. It can be used to add an extra level of security to your house. This barricade is useful to give you time to escape or still be able to control your house after someone has made it through the front door. Take a strong door and place it next to the stairwell secure the hinges to the ground so that it can close over the stairwell. Make sure there is a latch that holds it in place so it doesn't fall on its own. When the door is down you can secure 2x4s to the wall and the banister parallel to the door. These pieces of wood can secure cross braces, you can slide under them. Or you can just tip a few radiators on top of the door.

THE HOT WING:

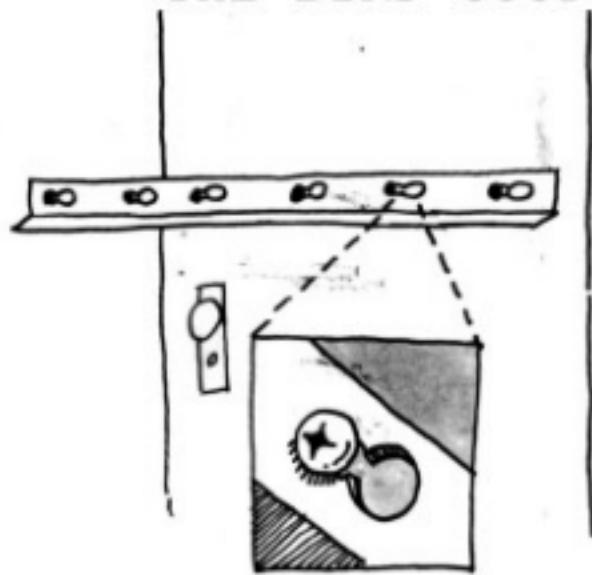
This barricade is a remotely deploying barricade for buildings with air lock or 2 front doors. Attach 2x4's in a U shape, the two arms that run parallel to each other should be the same length as the distance between the 2 doors. Make sure the hinges are accounted for. You can then install the wooden U on the second door. It should frame the door and not interfere with the operation of the door. To hold the barricade in place you can use a door latch or similar device. Lower the barricade and mark where it sits, install a block of wood on both sides to stop the falling barricade. You can wrap them in bike tubes or fabric to soften the impact. Attach steal wire or something suitably strong to the latch so that the wire can be pulled to drop the barricade into place. Run this wire up through the ceiling and into a living space so that it can be easily accessed. Take care that the wire is out of the way and that it won't be triggered or fail when you are not home, locking you out.

TYPES OF BARRICADES:

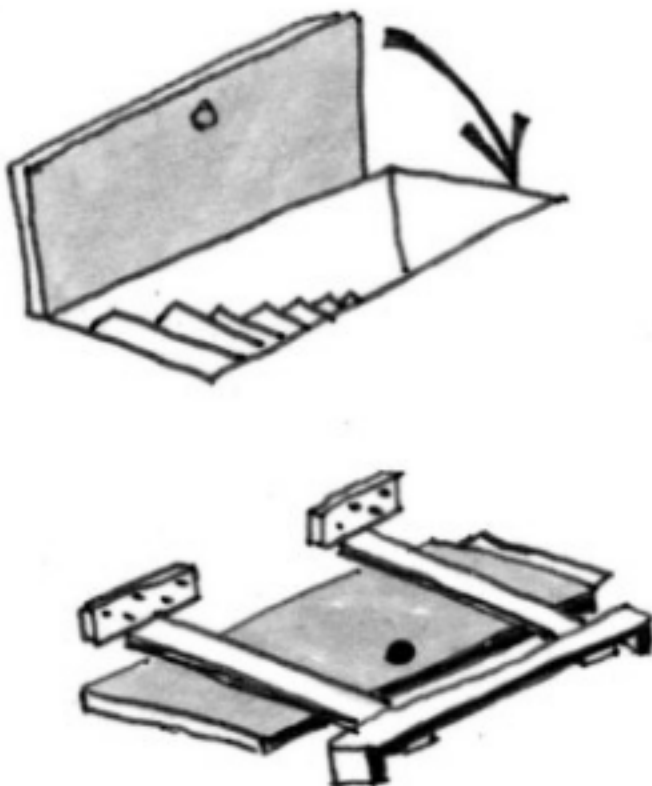
"THE FLUSHING"



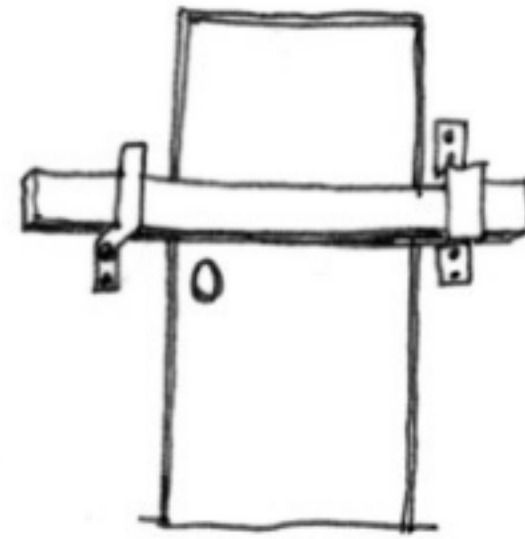
"THE BIRD COOP"



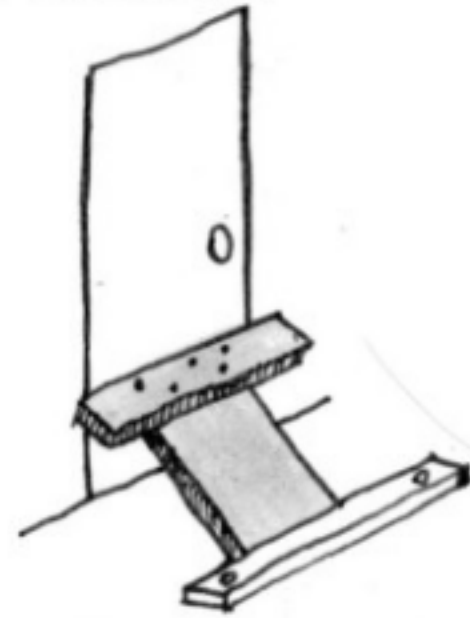
"THE TITANIUM DAN"



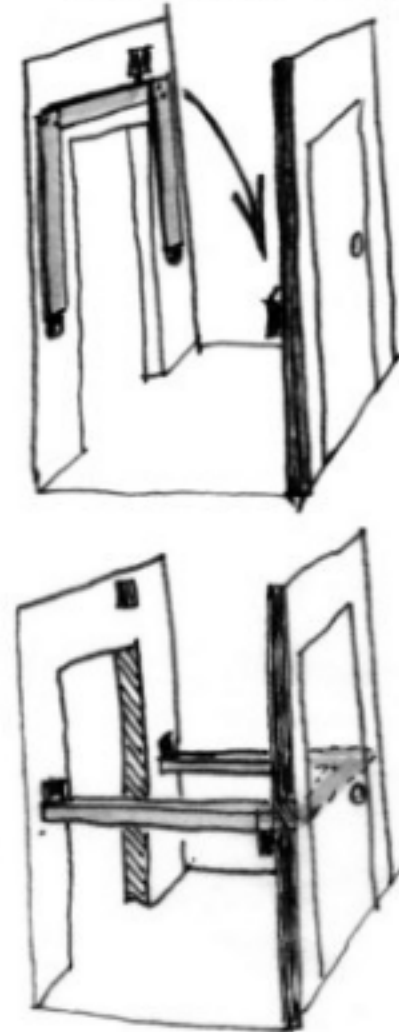
"THE OLD BOY"



"THE STOMPER"



"THE HOT-WING"



1. HOW TO FORM A GROUP

Going about squatting solo (at least at first) can often be the safest way to operate. That said, forming a group has many other benefits and can increase your ability to improve your collective situation once established. If you are with other people, having a tight and trusted group is crucial. Take time to get to know someone before you invite them to live in the house. A badly mixed, not-together group will do more damage to the project than the city government will in many cases. The people you live and work with can be more important than the building that you choose. One of the most important aspects of a group is diversity. Every group has its own style; some are more political than others, some like to party, some like to be real business-like and legal, some are arty, and others are maybe just trying to get over and off the street. Whatever your group is like, you should keep in mind that not only do you have to relate to each other, you also have to relate to your community. Just because you're squatting doesn't mean you won't play a role in gentrification. Be considerate of your surroundings and the community you are entering into. If the neighborhood has been affected by rampant gentrification and an influx of clueless and negligent out-of-towners who have no regard for pre-existing dynamics and a lack of cultural awareness, make sure you and your house exist in opposition to that.

A group of people living and working together who all agree on everything cannot exist; someone in the group is always going to have to shelve their opinions, give up, or compromise on an idea. As you will be living amidst the unfamiliar conditions of having no landlord and no way of calling in the police to settle your differences, you should give some thought to the kind of people you want to live with. There is a fine line between warehousing space and inviting in people who are not trustworthy or difficult to live with.

Once you've decided to squat, it's up to you to make the first move at contact and reaching out to people. How you do this depends on your situation. If you live on the street or a shelter, you will have a readily-

listen carefully and learn the sounds of the neighborhood, so when you hear something unusual (people talking about your house or gesturing about it, a drill or angle grinder), you can react fast.

It's important to be prepared for a variety of hostilities. Squats have had hired tough guys climb through the back of second story windows, security cameras stolen off roof tops, doors screwed shut with people living inside, locks cut and changed in the middle of the night, and a variety of hired workers and crews with different intimidation attempts. Be prepared for anything. Keep tools like angle grinders, bolt cutters, crowbars, and hacksaws outside the house. Not only can they possibly be incriminating, but if you're locked out of your house, you don't want the tools you need to get back in, locked inside. Think about ways that you can deal with hired tough guys and what the threat of potential violence is from them. Some squats have had holes in doors that they could spray pepper spray through, or had barricades inside the house that would allow the people living there to escape through the back yard or roof. There have been instances of people hired by the landlords impersonating police officers, but also plain-clothed cops evicting squats. So, just make sure you know what kind of hired thug you're dealing with.

It can be good to have an escape route, often on the roof or through the backyard. For the roof, make sure that you can lock or barricade the roof hatch or door. Some people keep a bunch of cinder blocks next to the roof hatch and pile them on top, or simply sit on the roof hatch so no one can follow you up. Sometimes there is a way you can get down from the roof, like through a neighbor's house or backyard.

Talking About the House:

It can often be good to let people know that you're squatting, because they can share resources and help you out. However, it's a risk to share too many details about your house. Only share with people who share with you, and don't be too fast to divulge information. Be wary of

new cylinder for it and replace that. All new locks come with diagrams and you can find helpful information about almost all locks online. We find that the Fox Police Lock is one of the best options for an extremely secure door, and are often found in old commercial buildings in New York.

Make sure that the bars on the window are secure and that the basement hatch is locked with your own large padlock. Make sure the roof hatch is secured from the inside. It is often a good idea to leave a very hidden way to break back into the house to get your stuff if you get evicted.

Expect someone to try to break in. Very few squats never have someone try to get in. In the case of an illegal eviction, you want to buy as much time as possible so you can go and start a dialog on your own terms. Landlords will sometimes hire a locksmith, or someone who knows how to pick or drill locks. You can get cylinders that are much harder to drill or pick, but they are expensive and most locksmiths can still defeat them. Your best bet to defend against attacks on your locks is strong barricading. You should either have a good enough lock that will give you time to react and put up barricades, or multiple locks. If you have a fence, make sure you keep it locked with a good padlock at all times (American padlocks are solid, avoid master locks or off-brand locks). The more doors with locks you have to get through, the better. There is no such thing as overkill when it comes to security.

Consider ways that you can be aware of what is happening outside the house at all times. Get in the habit of having the last person to come home put up the barricades when they get in for the night, so an early morning eviction attempt won't catch you off guard. Make sure you can hear what is happening in the front of the house. Make sure you have a discrete way to see what is going on without people seeing you. Thin blinds can often be seen through from the inside but not from the outside. Periscopes, security cameras hooked up to monitors, and things that make noise when moved, are all helpful. Whatever your solution is to be able to watch the front of the house, test it and make sure it works. You should be aware of your roommates coming in and out. Learn to

available supply of people who are in a similar situation to you. After studying this book, the next time someone says to you, "Goddamn! I'm sick of this shit!", spring the idea on them. Sit down, have a coffee and go over the pros and cons of squatting. We're sure you're going to disagree with some of the things we say, just as sure as you will come up with ideas of your own (with enough energy and luck). Hopefully, communicating with people in this way will help you to soon find yourself in a group which is seriously considering the option of squatting. Remember to keep meetings in-person and off social media! If you use the internet, don't be too quick to trust people - especially those who reach out to you there, or who you haven't known prior.

A more organized group dynamic will make a house more secure and pleasant to live in. Have house rules, weekly meetings, and home improvement work-days that everyone agrees on. Working together in a house is more fun, and brings the group together. What work people do will depend upon their abilities. Non-construction work such as cooking, gathering supplies/fuel, cleaning, and organizing will be invaluable to the group. There is always something to contribute, even if it's just lending a hand - and those that choose not to will undoubtedly piss everyone else off. Working on projects together can be a good way to learn from one another and stay close. Have some rules - about guests, who comes over, posting photos of the house online, length of stay, not talking about the house in person and/or online, and so on. The rules should be discussed in detail and agreed upon by all concerned. They should be written down, and posted somewhere visible, since verbal agreements can tend to get pretty vague after a few months as things become more casual.

Here are some sets of house rules that you can think about if you need ideas for your own:

- No hard drugs: they can be used as a pretext by the police to throw everyone out of the building.
- No violence.
- No stealing.

- Never let anyone in without everyone in the house knowing and agreeing.
- *Breaking any of these rules will get you thrown out*
- Every member must work a minimum of ___ hours per month on the common areas of the building.
- Every member must pay \$___ per month to a construction fund for common areas.
- All new members go through a trial period working on the building with old members for one month, and must be accepted as members by agreement of all other members.

Another set of house rules reads:

- No racism/transphobia/homophobia etc.
- Never give your keys to any guests and always make sure the door is locked by someone living in the house before guests enter and after they leave, and at all times otherwise.
- Guests can't stay longer than 2 weeks.
- Don't post any photos of the house online.
- New people moving in must have the full consent of all house members.
- Never leave candles lit when you're not in the room.

As a side note, the “no hard drugs” rule is a difficult thing that must be wrestled with. Having a safe place for people to use can save lives, and putting someone out on the street because they relapse is a pretty fucked up thing to do. At the same time, living with someone who is using around you can be difficult, especially if you yourself have struggled with drugs. There is no easy solution, and each group of people will have to figure out what works best for their specific context. Though, if you don't say no to hard drugs, consider making a rule that folks shouldn't use alone, and keep Narcan/naloxone (a drug used to prevent an overdose) in the house at all times, in personal spaces and especially in visible (and even noted areas) in common spaces.

We want to emphasize again that these rules are our own, and you will probably need to adapt them to your own circumstances. We

10. SECURITY

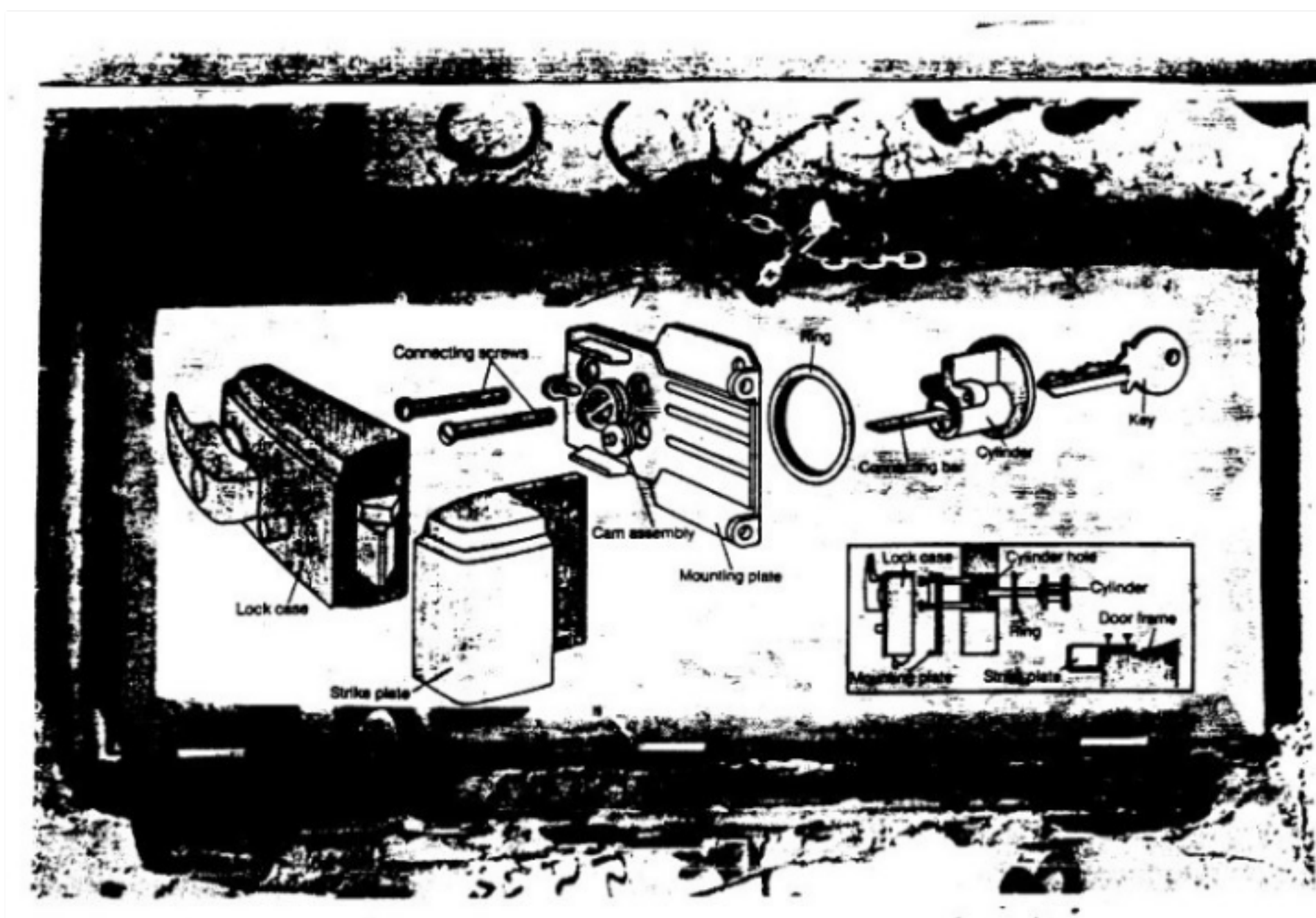
We felt it necessary to include an additional section on security. In 2020, the city is policed very differently than when this was first published. The makeup of New York has changed with gentrification, and neighbors are much more likely to be snitches. Being secure and discrete is crucial to making your house last. Each house is different, and depending on the context, different actions and precautions will work best.

Physical Security:

To secure the outside of the house, change the locks right away. Make sure change all locks so anyone who used to have a key no longer will. Make sure the lock, door, and door frame are secure and difficult to break in. Police love to kick down doors and are good at it. The best way to kick down a door is to land a good solid kick above or below the lock. If the door feels like it has give and wouldn't hold up against a cop boot, replace it. If the doorframe is weak, reinforce it with wood or metal. Make sure that the strike plate (which is the metal plate that sits on the door frame and receives the dead bolt or latch) is sound and attached securely into the door frame. The latch or dead bolt must be able to extend all the way into the hole. You can also get heavy duty, tall, door strike plates that help to further reinforce the door in its frame and run along the jamb. These make it extremely hard for your door to be kicked in and are touted as “burglar-proof”. Make sure the hinges are secured well in solid wood or metal. If the hinges have been installed multiple times and there are a lot of holes in the doorframe or the door, the hinges can be easily separated from the door. Try moving the hinges to a more solid part of the door/frame. If the hinges are exposed to the outside, you can get safety hinges at the hardware store that prevent the door from opening, even if the pins of the hinges are removed. If you can't secure the door, add a secondary door. Get multiple good quality locks. Though it can be expensive, it is absolutely worth it. You often don't need to replace the whole deadbolt or doorknob, but can just get a

and you'll need their help right away - for you've got only a few days to get a judge to issue a stay of execution order.

At the first sign of an eviction, someone should be using your "Eviction-Watch List" to contact all your friends and supporters, so that as many witnesses are on the scene as possible. This will keep the cops on their toes and on their "best behavior" - that is, slightly less likely to start beating people up. If the cops get through your front door, write down their badge numbers and names, and demand to see their identification. Have witnesses to absolutely everything. Videotape, audiotape and photograph whenever possible. You have a legal right to make a record of all that takes place. If the cops ask to speak to your leaders, tell them you don't have any. If they ask "Who is in charge?" or if they ask if you are in charge, tell them "Nobody is in charge." Never admit to having leaders, even if you do. At all times, be firm and reasonable with the cops unless you are ready for a fight. Be forewarned that the police in NYC are always ready for a fight.



also hope people will keep in mind the cruel wave of evictions that has made so many people homeless, when they consider whether or not an offense is serious enough to throw a member out.

Finally, the more people you know who are squatting, who are down to support squatters, or are just trusted friends, the more success you will have. Having people who support you outside of your house-mates is typically a positive thing.

2. FINDING A BUILDING AND INVESTIGATING IT

New York City is full of empty buildings that range from totally destroyed shells, all the way to buildings that are in pretty OK shape. The best way to find a building is to simply walk around the streets with your eyes open. Make a habit of it! Look at the buildings surrounding the one you've got your eye on. Take different routes and try to cover as much of a neighborhood as possible. Keep a list of houses you notice and pay attention to them over time. Learn to pick up on subtle clues; sometimes the houses that are the hardest to find are the best. When you start paying attention to buildings, you will be surprised at how many people are squatting in the city. When you're assessing buildings from the street, you can often break them down into four categories:

Category A: The building is in good shape, and is usually unoccupied for legal reasons. All utilities are in somewhat working order. If you're lucky enough to find a category A building, you may be able to pass as a normal tenant to police and neighbors.

Category B: The building is in OK shape, with potential for water or electricity available, but usually not both. It has minimal structural damage, and good security. These buildings are often half renovated or under construction.

Category C: The building has significant structural damage; there are holes in the floor or ceiling, and the building will often be condemned. There is decent capability for improvements, but little hope getting utilities. You will have decent security and shelter.

Category D: This is a structure that provides shelter from the elements. It is decently secure and better than sleeping on the street. A category D is often hard to improve.

Look for both industrial and residential buildings. We have often found that the block the building is on is more important than the neighborhood it's in. Be aware of what kind of community controls the area, and avoid squatting in areas where there is a tight knit community you're not a part of, who actively wants to keep out outsiders away. Areas with break-neck development often have buildings that sit vacant for years, waiting to be turned into a new high rise, with neighbors who are relatively oblivious of their surroundings. Lower-income neighborhoods will often have a lot of neglected property with neighbors who are friendly and understanding. Industrial areas often have buildings left vacant, with barely any neighbors, once workers go home each night. Keep your eyes open, and try to get rid of your preconceived notions of what constitutes a home and what is ultimately possible.

If you notice something is abandoned, take note of it and investigate it. Try to get an idea if any community groups or gangs have an eye on the building. If so, figure out if they are for real, and if they are move on to another building. Be particularly careful to avoid antagonizing any of your neighbors - especially during the first few months. As for dealing with the police, refer to Chapter 9 on legal hassles.

You will notice that some buildings have been painted with squares. These squares are painted by the city government to indicate the status of the building. An empty square indicates that the building is abandoned. A square with a slash in it indicates that fire fighters should be cautious entering the building. A square with an X in it indicates that the building is condemned. Don't presume the building is not good; perfectly good buildings get condemned all the time. However, a condemned building can be used as an excuse to throw you out fast.

If a building inspector, fire department official, or any other city worker tries to get into your house, don't let them in, and do your best to not let them know you are home. The fire department has the right to enter any house without a warrant, and they can also issue and enforce an immediate vacate order on it. Though, most times, the fire department won't break down a door unless they think someone's safety is at risk. The police can enter your house if they have a warrant, or "probable cause". If the cops have a warrant, ask them to slip it under the door before you let them in.

If you do receive a legal notice with your name on it, don't miss the court date unless you've cleared it with your lawyer or an informed housing activist in advance. If the notice doesn't have your name on it, or says "Resident" or "John Doe" or something like that, definitely do not answer it. It most likely shows that the landlord has not yet made a really serious attempt to find out who each and every one of your group is, and that they are trying to get an easy score with the "anyone living at this address" bullshit. However, you should take the notice to a tenants' rights organizer or housing lawyer for advice, and then take it to the clerk of the court's office so that you can put it on record that nobody with those names lives at your building. Never sign for or accept any registered or certified mail until you are absolutely sure it is not from the city government. It could be a summons or an eviction notice!

If the people in your building start getting eviction notices, be sure that there is always someone living with you (who has proof of residency) who hasn't been named in a notice. This way, if it comes down to an eviction, HPD won't be able to seal the building since there will still be someone living there that they can't evict yet. Once the "eviction-minus-one" is over and the cops are gone, you can move back in without problem.

If the authorities have served you with notice that the building is going to be evacuated for reasons of public safety, you'll have to come up with a detailed plan that shows how you are going to repair the problem. You will no doubt need the help of professionals to do this,

If a neighbor calls the cops, be prepared to have some kind of story of why you're allowed in the house. While it is within your rights to just ask to see a warrant if they want to come into the house, it may not be the best approach. Cops love hierarchy. If you can defer blame to another person of allegedly higher authority than you, there is a good chance that the cops will leave you alone. Expect that police will pull up the building on the city data bases (ACRIS and DOB) mentioned in Chapter 2. They will often try to find out who the owner is and try to contact them. Before the cops are at your door, see if the owner of the building can be easily contacted. If they can't, then you can just tell the cops that you have an agreement/are in touch with the owner. Property owners use shell companies to protect themselves from liability; you can do something similar. Have a friend, or even just a phone number you know won't pick up - to pose as the person who you work for, who you pay rent to, or who has an agreement with the owner. When the cops question you, act casual and relaxed, as if you have no reason to worry about police attention. Tell them you live in this house, and answer all other questions just vaguely enough, or say you don't know. Offer to put them in touch with the person who you answer to. Give them the phone number, and when no one picks up, assure them the person is probably just busy and that they can call back later.

The police may order you to open up the house, and threaten to arrest you if you refuse. Keep in mind that any charges they give you probably won't stick - especially if they have no legal right to order you. A day in central bookings, and maybe a day of community service, is most likely worth keeping your house.

You cannot be denied welfare benefits because you are a squatter. It is illegal for the Bureau of Child Welfare to take your children from you on the grounds that you are a squatter. Besides, plenty of people pay rent to live in apartments that are in terrible condition; these people's children are not taken from them because of these conditions! Persistence and good legal advice will be your best weapons as you try to make sure your rights are being respected and are not being arbitrarily violated.

Look for buildings with a lot of mail coming out of the mailbox, no garbage cans in the front yard, lots of weeds or overgrown grass, and graffiti. Look for expired construction permits, old meter reading access notices, and rat poison signs. Look in to the windows. Does the building look empty? Sometimes buildings will be left vacant, but with the lights left on - especially hallway lights. Just because there is a light on doesn't mean it is being used; just approach buildings like this with extra caution. Newer or recently remodeled (and yet, empty) buildings with no permits of any kind can be of interest, too. Look for obvious signs of abandon like boarded up windows and chains through the door instead of door knobs. A building that is relatively low profile is ideal. Look for something that doesn't have a lot of neighbors on the block.

What kind of person or group you are and your disposition will determine the kind of block your house will do well on. Some people will do great on a block where everyone hangs out outside and you have to meet your neighbors. Other people will do well in the kind of spot where you can go in and out through an alley with no one seeing you. How you present your self can make a big difference.

Once you have found a few buildings that look promising, tape the doors, and other points of entry. This is the process of putting tape in such a way, that if someone uses a door it will disturb the tape. Put the tape from the doorframe to the door, or over the keyway of a lock. Black electrical tape or duct tape works well. Let the buildings sit for a little while (about a week up to a month), and then go back to see if the tape has been disturbed. Be extra careful to make sure the building isn't being used by someone to sleep in or as a stash spot.

Doing Research

Doing research on the buildings you are looking at is a crucial next step. NYC has many public databases that are available for free online. These include: ACRIS (which is best for looking up deeds, mortgages and history of ownership), the NYC Department of Buildings (or the DOB - an online database that has a lot of useful information and can give you a clearer picture as far as complaints and vio-

lations, and lots of other records), and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (or HPD - a database of buildings, but only those zoned as residential are required to register with them - so it can be hit or miss).

To figure out the building info, get the address and go to the building information services website at: <http://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb> (or search “dept. of building information service”). Select “building information search” and put in your building’s address. The page it will bring you to has a lot of helpful info. First, you’ll get the “block and lot” numbers, which are numbers used by the city to organize its buildings. Write these down for future use. It lists the complaints on the building, the permits taken out on the building, whether or not the building has a vacate order, and what other violations the building has. If you click on the numbers next to a violation or complaint, it opens up a page with more in-depth information. If the building has a permit for renovation or demolition, it can sometimes take years before they will start.

Once you read through the DOB page, take your block and lot number and go to ACRIS at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/finance/taxes/acris.page> (or search “acris property search”). Click “begin using ACRIS”, then select “search property records”, and then “parcel identifier”. Enter in your BBL (Borough, Block, Lot) info and hit search (you don’t need to enter anything else if you don’t want/need to). You can also choose to search by “party name” or “document type - both of which may be useful for reverse searching down the line. This site will show transaction records. You can see if a building was foreclosed on, recently bought, or has been in one person’s possession for a long time. It’s helpful to google the companies involved as parties, as they are often holding companies and not actually the individual party who owns the property. Some people are successful asking the owners of abandoned buildings if they can live there, in exchange for caring for the property. These websites are confusing at first, but it’s worth spending a little time learning to decipher them. Also check out the Department of Finance’s website at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/finance/index.page> (or

A good strategy with landlords is the carrot and the stick approach. This is where you are friendly and reasonable, demonstrate that you are improving the building, and responsible and not going to cause any trouble, while also quietly showing that it will be hell to get you out. Carrots can be things like: improvements on the house, correcting violations, and getting the house up to code, or taking care of other issues that the building has that cost or could potentially cost the landlord money. Sticks can include: letting the landlord know you have a lawyer who will defend you, shows of support from the community, demonstrating confidence and a lack of intimidation, and most importantly - a secure house, full of people. By offering small incentives to let you be, and large deterrents to evicting you, a decent amount of time can be bought in a building. Subtly letting the landlord know that you know that they’re doing something illegal or are in violation of a law of any sort is also some good ground to stand on. Remember that landlords are usually sketchy, and are constantly cutting corners. Use that to your advantage.

If the police show up, you should be prepared to talk to them. It’s best if you can talk with them through the door or a fence, and if you can’t, have one person who is the most comfortable dealing with police go outside and lock the door behind themselves right away. Have someone in the house come down after and quietly put barricades in place. If you know that a neighbor or a landlord has called the police, it can be good to wait outside the house to meet them. If the police are called by the landlord, you need to convince them that, although you are having a conflict with the landlord, it is a civil matter, and not a criminal matter. Be prepared to produce proof of residency.

If the police side with the landlord, say that you will comply with an eviction order once it is given. If they try to get you to leave the house, firmly refuse until you are served with a notice. Make them follow through on the whole process. You have a legal right to council and a hearing. Make the landlord go through every step, and don’t leave the house until a marshal knocks on the door.

can read off this sheet of paper and assert your legal rights as an occupant. It has worked before.

Since eviction procedures are costly and can take quite some time, the landlord may very well try other ways to get you out, such as a buy-out, or intimidation and harassment. Many landlords will go straight for intimidation. A common response of landlords once they find out about you is to try to evict you right away (illegally) by breaking in, often with a locksmith. Barricades can be crucial in this situation. If someone starts trying to evict you, it is best to run down and let them know that you are a legal resident and that they need to go through the formal eviction procedure. We've seen that it is often helpful to know the laws - especially from the landlord's point of view - and make yourself seem like more of a headache to deal with than you're worth. This often deters landlords from going through a formal eviction process. They may instead just offer to buy you out for a large sum of money. If this is the route you choose to go, high ball them. If they are cutting locks or trying to break in, document them in the act, as well as the damage they did, etc. Try to get photos of cars and license plates. Some squats have even had security cameras to deter illegal eviction attempts. It is usually in your best interest to not be overly confrontational. Demonstrate that you know your rights. Try to negotiate with the landlord and let them know that you are willing to work with them (even if you have no intention of leaving). Point out that you are responsible and working hard to improve the building. You should know as much as you can about the situation of the building, so that you know what makes sense when/if you have to talk to the landlord.

Asserting your rights to a landlord can sometimes be a catch-22. If the landlord does something illegal, it's a bad bet that calling the police will end up in your favor. It's always best to keep police out of situations. The police have a bad tendency to act as judge, jury, and executioner - usually on the side of the property owner. The best thing you can do, is always maintain possession of your house. Once the landlord has access to the house, no matter how many illegal things he did, you are not going to keep it.

search for "nyc dept of finances"). Scroll down to the "featured online tools" section, and then click "property tax system". Put in your BBL and it'll show you the tax info, but most importantly: who owns it, and if they pay their taxes. Finding a building with outstanding taxes is a great sign.

These websites are important to be familiar with, however there are some incredibly helpful tools coming out of the tenants rights movement in NYC, which utilizes info obtained via city databases, and compiles it in a more user-friendly way. Who Owns What (<https://whoownswhat.justfix.nyc/en/>) is a wonderful resource; it will show other buildings owned by your landlord, whether or not the building is registered with HPD, and it will also give you links to ACRIS, BIS, HPD, and DOF - all on one page. It gives an overview of the landlord, including how many evictions they have done, how many rent-stabilized apartments they have gotten rid of, and other helpful information.

If the building has been abandoned for years, was owned by an individual and they were foreclosed on by a bank, has a tax lien on it, has a lot of overdue DOB fines; these are all good signs. But, just because you find a building where none of these apply, doesn't mean it's not a good building. There are many reasons why a building would be empty. It's important to do as much research as possible. Look for news articles and other sources that can give you more information about the owners. Sometimes, it's a good idea to call the number listed for the owner just to see if anyone answers the phone. If they're impossible to get ahold of, that's probably a good sign. Learning how to pick buildings is hard, and is best learned through experimentation. The more buildings you research and the more buildings you get access to, the more you will develop a sense of what buildings you want to live in.

3. GETTING IN

The first step to getting into a building is what squatters call “cracking” a building. This is the process of first entering a building, sometimes by climbing onto the roof or cutting a lock. This is easily the most legally risky part of squatting. When figuring out how to crack a building, you want to look for the most subtle, quiet, and easy way in. You don’t want to leave obvious signs that there was a forced entry, and if you have to damage something, make sure you can repair it or replace it fast. Try to avoid using tools, or use the minimum amount of tools necessary. Before you think of cracking the house, you should have scoped it out thoroughly. Be familiar with the block, the area, and the surrounding traffic. Pick a good time to crack it, when not many people will be out. Look for ways onto the roof, to the back door, or into the basement. Look for open windows or boards that are easy to get off. If there is a normal doorknob, it’s best to get in the house another way, and then unlock the door from the inside. If there’s a padlock, you’re going to have to cut it eventually. When you do this, a look out is useful. 24-36 inch bolt cutters will cut most metal around a 1/4 inch thick (a lot of Master Locks and padlocks). For anything bigger, you may need 48 inch bolt cutters, or an angle grinder or hack saw. Common locks are: the Master Lock #3, similar combination locks from MasterLock (often on construction sites), and dollar store/ Tuff Stuff locks (these locks tend to be simple to cut). Larger Master Locks and bigger dollar store locks are common, and can require a little more effort. Often, it’s best to brace the handle of the bolt cutters on the door-frame or ground, and push on one handle with all your weight. Sometimes, it can take two people to cut a lock. American padlocks, Medico locks, and other round-body locks with large shackles usually cannot be cut with bolt cutters. Chains are often easier to cut than a lock, but you’ll have to make two cuts. Sometimes, the hasp (the piece of metal the padlock goes through), is easier to cut or break with a crow bar. Sometimes, you can even unscrew it from the door. If you are cutting a lock from the outside, find a lock that looks similar to the lock you are cutting, and keep it unlocked in your pocket so it’s ready to go when

great proof. Going to your bank and changing your address on file then asking for proof of that address is a good way to get a legal document with your new address on it quickly. They will give you a void check that displays your name and address - on the spot. Any one of these proofs of address must be over 30 days old. That’s why it’s often best to move as low profile as possible for the first 30 days of the house and until you can prove that you’re a resident. If you meet the landlord or a neighbor calls the cops before you have proof of residency that’s over 30 days old, they can throw you out.

Once you have gotten residency, working diligently and productively on the front of the house will give your neighbors a chance to size you up, and to come out and talk to you. They will (hopefully) respect you when they see you working on your place.

If you are confronted by the police or the landlord, you have a right to all the protections inherent in the eviction process. They must first properly serve you with a “notice to quit”, which gives you 10 days to move out. Serving legal papers is a bureaucratic legal process. If it is done incorrectly, the court case can get thrown out and the landlord has to start again. It’s not unlikely that they’ll screw up somewhere. Never take any mail or notice someone hands to you. Never open the door for someone you don’t know. After you are served your “notice to quit” and if you don’t move out after 10 days, the landlord must then file a “notice of petition” and again, serve you properly. You will then have a court date, which you should go to. There are plenty of ways to make the court process take longer, but even if it’s fast, the landlord then has to hire a sheriff or marshal to carry out the actual eviction. The sheriff again has to serve papers and can take a long time to actually show up. Even if you stay until the sheriff comes and changes the lock, so long as you leave when told to, you are committing no crime. There is a more formal write out of some of the relevant laws in the centerfold (or at the end of the PDF if you’re reading this on a screen), which we encourage you to duplicate and keep more than one copy handy, next to the door and somewhere else safer. If confronted by the landlord or police, you

9. LEGAL HASSLES

Because of decades of activists' and squatters' struggle, NYC has many laws designed to protect tenants. However, the NYPD and the landlords and developers of the city, are especially skilled at ignoring and maneuvering around laws.

The first thing to be concerned with is proving that you are a resident and not a trespasser. The police can arrest you for trespassing. However, if you are an "occupant" - aka someone with a proven legal right to be there - they must follow proper eviction procedure. Police cannot evict you legally - only a marshal or a sheriff with a court order can. So, your first order of business should be proving that you reside at this property. Being in possession of a key to the space is crucial. Having the house look nice, or at least having it be clear that you are working on it, can help a lot. Every effort you can make to show that you have established as normal as possible of a residence will be an advantage in dealing with the law. Operate on the assumption that you are a law-abiding citizen and a legal tenant of the building in which you are squatting until it has been decided otherwise in a court of law. Use your address freely, and get library cards, swimming cards, and other forms of ID that have your address on it.

Have mail sent to you at your building. This will help you prove that you live there and that you aren't breaking-and-entering or trespassing. Put your address on the front door and make a mail slot in it or add a mail box. If you are not getting mail, it is probably because your address is no longer registered to receive mail with the post office. Pay attention to when mail is delivered to your street and be there when the mail carrier comes by. Explain that you are living here and that you will be receiving mail at this location. Sometimes the carriers will be uncooperative, but usually they will be friendly if you are friendly.

To prove that you are an occupant, you should get official mail such as: a bank statement, bills, government mail, and so forth. Opening utilities in your name and being able to produce a bill in your name is

you need it. Often, lock boxes are found locked to the building containing the keys for entry. Check window grates and surrounding fences. Most lock boxes can be removed by cutting the shackle, then opened with an angle grinder or hack saw.

When you cut the lock, put your new lock on and leave right away. Make sure to take any metal pieces from the cut lock with you, and dispose of them away from the area. Don't leave any evidence that the lock has been cut. It is important to just cut the lock and leave. If someone saw you and called the cops, the last thing you want is for the police to roll up on you inside a dark, abandoned house you've never been in with "breaking and entering tools" in your possession. Change the lock, ditch your tools and the old lock, and let the house cool down before you go back with your key to check it out.

When you go back into the house, you'll want to be as low profile as possible. Bring a headlamp and no other tools, but maybe a notebook to take notes and write down things you notice. You'll want to avoid taking tools, because trespassing is a misdemeanor - however, breaking and entering is a felony, along with burglary. So don't bring any tools that could be used to charge you with B&E, and don't remove anything from the house. The first time you go into the house, you will just want to evaluate the condition of the building. It is good to do this with two people. Vacant buildings can be dangerous, and you should (at the very least) let someone know where you are. Make sure you have a flashlight, but be careful not to shine light out the window. Many headlamps have a red setting, which is ideal because it allows your eyes to be adjusted to the dark, and is harder to see shining out of windows and through cracks than white light.

When you are in the building, expect that there will be parts of the floor and stairs that are rotted and cannot support your weight. Be extra cautious on stairs; stay towards the walls and try to use the railing or wall to hold on to. Tread carefully and do your best to be silent.

First evaluate the state of the building. Assess the space and its safety. Look for holes in the floor, or areas of the floor that don't look safe or feel spongy. Look for anything hanging from the ceiling that

could fall. Look for exposed wires. Make sure the stairs are safe and secure. Notice all potential hazards, and take notes to make preparations to fix them right away.

Locate leaks in the roof and be aware that as water runs inside, it causes wood to rot and become weak. Look for water stains, caved-in dry wall, other wetness, and so forth. Water will often go through the roof and down one or two floors, causing rot and mold throughout the building. The longer the roof leaks, the worse it will get. Holes in the roofs of buildings are the most common reason for structural failure. That's what often makes a building "unlivable", according to the city. Check the basement. Look for water meters, electrical switch boxes (check to see if they are on or off), and take notice of how much of the plumbing and electric is intact.

Look for old mail, calendars, and other signs that can give you a clue to when the last people were in there. Did it look like there were other squatters at one point? Was there construction being done? Is the house empty or full of old furniture and trash? All of this is helpful information to know and keep in mind.

To evaluate the state of the building, have a look at the exterior walls of the building you're researching. You may have to wait until you've gotten inside before you can get to the back of the building to evaluate it, but what you need to look at is the same. Are there major holes in the masonry? If they can't be filled or covered, they might be significant structural defects. Are there signs of bulging or sagging? Are there wide gaps where the mortar joints should be? If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, find another building to squat.

Is the fire escape pulling loose from the wall? Is it falling apart? Is the cornice (the part that sticks out from the face of the building along the roof) broken apart and dangling? If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," you've got dangers to people walking on the sidewalk in front of the building, and so you will have to fix these problems. But remember: though a cornice is just a decorative frill (and so it can be removed or tied back so it won't fall), its deterioration can be a

more information on solar power, online forums dedicated to RV's and sailboats hold a wealth of information.

One last reminder... Please! Don't mess around with your breaker box or anything else if you don't know what you're doing. Seriously, that shit will light you up if you touch the wrong thing. Spend some time learning about what is live and what isn't before you get going doing anything on your own. It's not impossible to tackle this stuff yourself. But it is really easy to get hurt by way of a simple mistake. Put in a few solid hours of research so you understand what you're dealing with and don't proceed until you're comfortable. All houses are going to be different, and a lot of them (if you choose to deal with the electrical systems) are going to need some undoing of the electrician who came before, or repairing the messy state it's been left in. When you're doing your work, always think of the next person who's going to have to touch that shit after you, and ask yourself if everything is clear enough (labeled, even) so someone who isn't you could work on the system after your repairs.

ly physical difference between any of these wires is the color of the plastic insulation. A green wire can carry current just as effectively as a black wire of the same gauge, so NEVER assume a wire's safety by its color.

Solar:

An alternative is to power your home circuits with solar panels, which are surprisingly easy to acquire in urban settings. They are often used to power monitoring equipment on construction sites during foundation work, powering signal boxes along freight train tracks and temporary electronic road construction signs. The three main components are: the panel, the charge controller, and the battery bank. Where one is found, you can find the others. An inverter changes the 12 or 24 volts DC current (generated by the panel) in to useable 120 volts AC (what's found in buildings). Unfortunately, it's not likely you will be able to heat a home with a solar-powered setup, but fans and lights are easy to use. IKEA has a line of led lights that plug in to the wall; included in the circuit is a little box that changes the 120 volts AC (from your wall) in to 12 volts DC (which you can get directly from a solar panel), so just omit the little box.

Hand Tools:

Flathead and Philips screwdrivers for terminals, outlets and conduit connections, channel-lock style pliers for separating conduit from boxes and removing "punch-outs" to run new conduit into boxes, combination wire stripper/cutters with the ability to strip 14AWG wire, box cutter for stripping cable housing, an extra set of needle-nose or bullnose/linesman pliers will certainly come in handy, as well as some sort of work light and gloves.

Further Resources:

Any of the hard cover Home Repair books will pick up where this leaves off as far as wiring outlets and switches goes, and a small spiral bound book titled "Ugly's Electrical References" covers everything from the mathematical principles and formulae behind calculating loads, to bending conduit, first aid, and everything in between. For

sign of overall deterioration. A dangerous cornice is a building code violation and can get your squat closed down.

Inspect the roof. Check it for holes. Look for missing, burnt or rotted joists - which are the timbers that support roofs and floors. Rot can be tested by sticking a knife in the lumber as far as it will go. When checking for rot, find a spot where the leaking water soaks in and doesn't dry up right away. Up to an inch may be rotted or burnt, and the timbers might still be OK. The ends of the joists can suffer a lot of deterioration without endangering the structure, but the joists in the middle cannot be weakened without risking collapse. Check the parapet walls around the roof to see if (or how badly) they are falling apart and what will need to be done to them to make them safe.

Inspect the stairs. If you're lucky, there will be nothing wrong with the stairs except for some missing steps. If the building has no staircase at all, you will have a lot of work to do (perhaps too much). Until you are able to replace the stairs, you will have to use the fire escape or a ladder in place of stairs. There are enough buildings with stairs around that you may be wasting your time on one that doesn't have any staircase at all. One squat in NYC was evacuated by the Fire Department for not having stairs. Eviction by landlords can be delayed by legal means for a long time, but evacuation by the city's Fire, Health, or Buildings Departments is swift and hard to contest.

Inspect the floor joists. These are the timbers that support the floors. Make note where they are missing or damaged. If the floors are sloping more than an inch or so, this may mean that the structure has shifted so much that it has become dangerous. If timbers are dangerously damaged, they can be braced by scavenged lumber (four-by-fours are best).

Inspect the sewer pipes. The toilets will typically be smashed or missing, but the water pipes may be in salvageable condition. Follow the waste pipes through the building and down to the basement, checking for holes along the way. Look for holes in the walls, which may have been made in order to damage the pipes and thereby discourage squatters. Copper water pipes will almost certainly have been stripped,

but if there were steel pipes originally, they may still be in place and useable. If your plumbing is in OK condition, you can probably get your water running pretty soon.

Inspect the front door. How sound is the door, door jamb, and hinges? Notice what kind of lock you will need to secure the door in the best way possible. Often houses will have enough rubble around that you can make a makeshift barricade at the door, secure windows, the roof hatch, the basement, and all doors. Even if you can't get everything totally locked, it's important to make an assessment of how secure the house is. From the basement to the roof, make sure you notice every possible point of entry and make a plan to secure it.

It is often good to crack more than one building before moving in, if you can. Evaluate a few, and move into the one you think is best, so if you get kicked out or run into problems that don't seem worth it, you'll already have a second or third house lined-up. Once you have cracked and evaluated a few houses and have a feel for each neighborhood, pick one and start to plan how to move in.



building (or at least a very large circuit). Examine the rest of the circuit, and flip that switch with a long 2x4. You don't want to impulsively flip that switch just to find a wire in the next room with a nick in the insulation that then energizes the soggy wooden floor you're standing on.

Wires, Colors and "Codes":

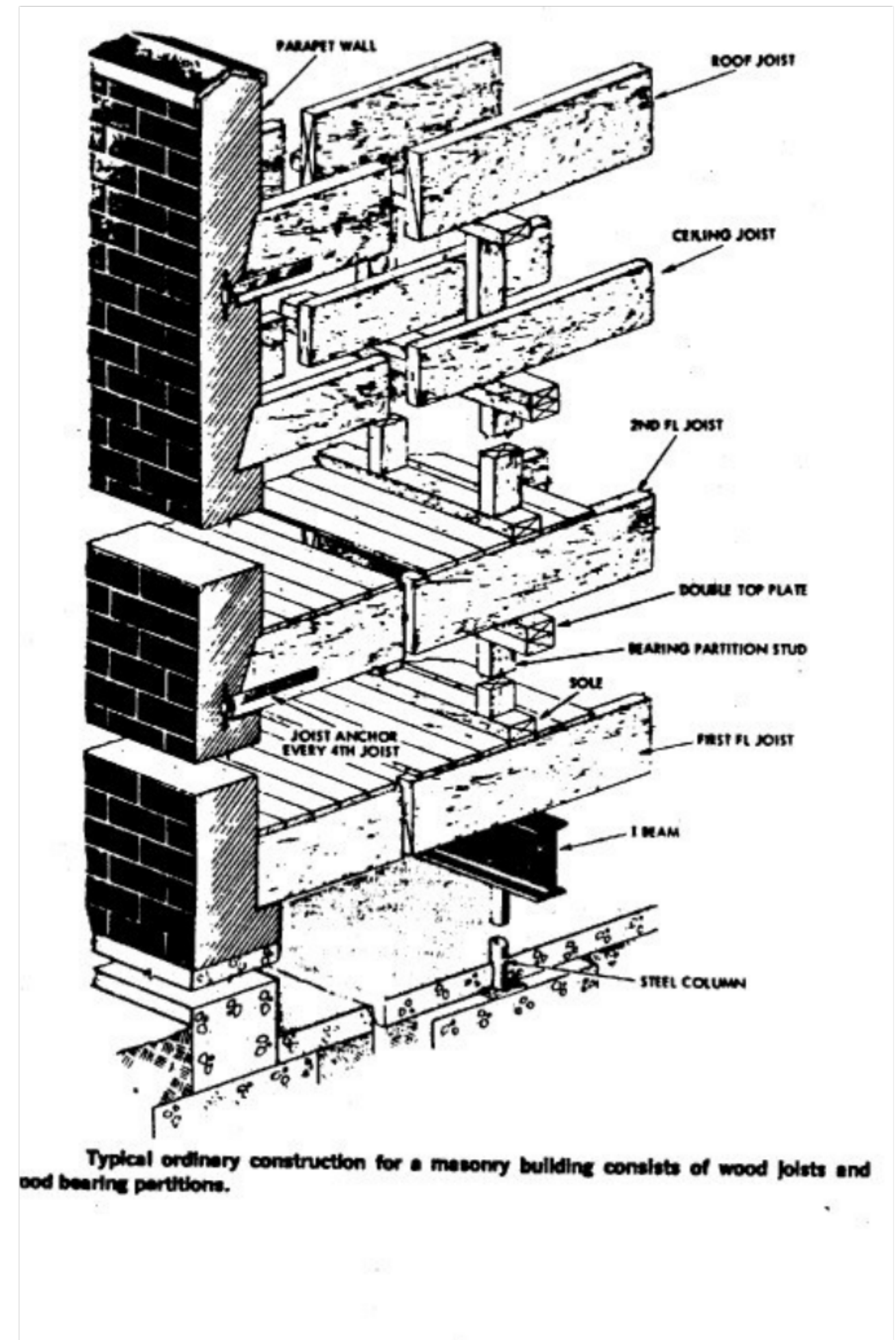
Depending on a number of factors - such as the age of the building, construction budget, and any wacky repairs that may have been attempted along the way - you're likely to come across electrical systems in a wide array of conditions. You may find that the building has all of its electrical components ripped out - including the meter. You may find that you have some faulty wiring going on from an old installation, which you'll have to fix, or that all of it is in pretty bad shape visually but seemingly functions fine. In the case of the latter, proceed with caution and try not to do anything too sketchy. Knowing local code for what everything is supposed to look like is helpful in doing your own work, fixes, and installations. Having things up to code in your house can even be what makes or breaks you if anyone does get inside (a landlord, inspector, the cops...). Do your research to ensure personal safety and reduce the precariousness of your situation and its optics. It's common that in old houses with shoddy wiring that you'll trip a breaker consistently when you plug in heavy-draw appliances to specific outlets. Sometimes you may stumble upon a building that has a perfectly fine electrical system installed.

Wire is identified by gauge (diameter of wire without insulation, measured by American Wire Gauge or AWG), color, and whether it's made of many small strands of copper or one single strand. The higher the gauge, the thinner the wire (oddly). Lamp cords are commonly 18AWG, whereas wires you'd find connecting an outlet to the breaker tend to be 12 or 14AWG. The thinner the wire, the less it can handle power-wise. Wire insulation is color coded, and ideally your entire building was wired to a stringent and updated code, but that's not likely. Black, red, or white with black dash marks commonly denote a wire carrying current. Neutral wires can be white or grey, and ground wires can be either bare, with no insulation, or green. However, the on-

itself subject to a fire? If so, wire insulation may have melted inside of metal conduit and should never be energized. A strong piece of advice would be to strip whatever components (wires, switches, outlets, etc) you can out of the walls and when the time comes, rebuild your own circuit with more comprehensive resources so that you will have an ultimate understanding of the electrical system instead of just guessing and hoping that the people before you did a good job.

Breakers:

The very first step after acquiring an NCVD is finding the breaker box. Look for a battleship grey, metal door somewhere along the wall. If you can't find it, it's possible that it has been stolen. They often reside in basements or closets. Once you find it and open it (there shouldn't be any sort of lock), ideally you will see three large wires coming from either the top or the bottom, and one or more columns of small, black rectangular switch-looking-things called "circuit breakers". These each have a number (important) noting how many amps are required to overload and "trip" the breaker. Each breaker is responsible for controlling and protecting a branch circuit. A branch circuit could be all the outlets for a certain room, or the outlets along a wall in a certain room, kitchen appliances, etc. Larger amp breakers are generally only used when there's a large load. It's not uncommon to have one very large breaker responsible for 90% of an apartment, and one smaller breaker responsible for the refrigerator or a similar large-draw appliance. In short, electricity comes from the utility company and goes directly into this box. This box then distributes the electricity elsewhere in the house. However, the most important function is the ability of the breakers to "trip", or turn off a branch circuit when it detects some sort of fault. A fault can be plugging too many things in at once, and overloading the circuit. If you have a breaker that continually trips, don't just keep resetting it. Instead, find out why it's tripping and avoid the issue in the future. Space heaters are often the culprit - electric tea kettles and electric stoves as well. Lastly, if you see three grey boxes next to each other with a large, tempting lever on the side or even just one large box with said lever, this is a box that controls probably the entire



4. MOVING IN

When this book was first written, they wrote, “Now, you're ready to move in. If the area you're in is run-down, it's possible that no one will bother you while you smash out the concrete blocks. With a twelve-pound sledge hammer...” in 2020, we would encourage you to take a more delicate approach to moving in.

Your approach will be different depending on the neighborhood, the political/economic environment, the ownership situation, and your group's type/size. For a lot of houses, one of the best things to do is a “sleeper month”. This is where you take a month for the sole purpose of establishing residency. The first step in this period is to receive mail. For more instructions on mail, see Chapter 9. Install a mailbox and get mail sent to the house ASAP. Try to limit the amount of visible changes made to the house, but do immediately change the locks. Even if the locks aren't very secure, they are important to have. Having a front door with a presentable lock, beds and other basics, such as a kitchen, is good for your own well-being, but it is also important in establishing that you are a resident and not a trespasser. Keeping the house in good tidy shape is also helpful, especially the doorway. It may seem like a small point, but it is actually quite important. It can make the difference between getting run out of the building by the cops if they feel like it, and getting them to back down so that they will have to wait until the owner manages to go through the lengthy proceedings necessary to legally evict you.

During the sleeper month, make sure that no one notices you in the house. Go in and out as little as possible, at times when the block is empty. You don't need to be at the house everyday or fully move in. Bring tools and supplies you need to start making emergency repairs. Focus on the front entryway and any other areas that can be seen from the street. Get to work cleaning the house, getting water on, and setting up a sanitary bathroom and makeshift kitchen. Do as much as you can do without drawing attention to yourself. Once your mail is 30 days old, you'll have legal proof of residency, which can show that you are not trespassing. Now you can introduce yourself to your neighbors.

Basic Electrical Tools and Safety:

In some houses (like a category A), the electrical system may be on already, and all you have to do is switch the breakers on. With other houses that are in good shape, you may have to call the electrical company and open an account. It can be good to pay for electricity and have an account in your name. It can give you strong proof of residency. However, in many houses, turning on power will be much more complex. Electricity in a squat is more of a luxury than a basic need. This section is intended to help you make sure your house is safe and give you a fundamental understanding, but in no way is it a guide. Most houses have to have extensive work done on the electric before it is safe - if not install a completely new system from scratch. When you are ready to work on the electrical system, ask around and see if you can find a like-minded electrician who can help you. **DO NOT WORK ON ELECTRIC SYSTEMS UNLESS YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING.**

A Non Contact Voltage Detector (NCVD) is very strongly recommended, especially when entering a building and diagnosing the electrical system. Small and cheap, it's a pen shaped device that lets you press a button and hold against an insulated wire, outlet, switch or other potentially energized component, that makes a noise and/or lights up if voltage is present. A basic multimeter with a continuity function greatly simplifies tracing circuits from the breaker box, when combined with two long lengths of wire for the leads.

Hazards:

The brevity of this section can't possibly prepare and train you for every possible electrical hazard you may come across, but it can identify some common ones. Never work on live circuits (unless you have the proper tools and guidance; this zine is not proper guidance) and more importantly, assume every circuit is live until you can prove it isn't. By “circuit”, we don't just mean wires and outlets; anything metallic or wet that's in contact with a live wire can be energized. Are there charred marks on or above outlets? If so, the circuit was overloaded and the breaker didn't do its job, so you can trust neither. Was the building

cheap and there are many resources you can find outside of this book that will help you learn how to do plumbing the right way.

If you have electricity, you can get a small (5-7 gallon) under-the-sink hot water heater for a few hundred bucks. If everyone in the house chips in, it is most definitely worth it to have hot water to do dishes with in the winter, and even to take (extremely short) showers with. Even if you don't have electric, there are propane hot water heaters that are designed for camping that can be found for under \$200.

In the winter, you should take care that your pipes don't freeze - especially because your building probably won't be heated. Keep faucets dripping or adjust the floaters in toilet tanks to cycle water. Do your best to insulate pipes. They make insulation designed to wrap around pipes, but if you can't get your hands on that, you can use bubble wrap, newspaper, or fabric. If pipes freeze, do your best to thaw the pipes before the ice cracks them.

If you can't get water, don't worry. There are many alternatives to city water. Collect rain water from the roof and store it in 50 gallon food-grade drums. You can drill holes in the drums, install fittings, and run gravity-fed pipes to the sinks. Make sure the drums have a way to let out water when they are full, so water doesn't back-up the gutter and so the roof can still drain well. Make sure that you cover any openings with mesh (window screen works) to keep out bugs. It's best to only use this water for washing and flushing the toilet, and not for drinking. If you can't set up a gravity-fed system, then consider using "primer bulbs", which connect to clear plastic tubing and can be found at big hardware stores as small foot pumps. You can also use bilge pumps designed for sailboats to pump water to your sink.

Basic supplies for plumbing: adjustable wrench, pipe wrench, pipe cutter, teflon tape, hose clamps, fittings.

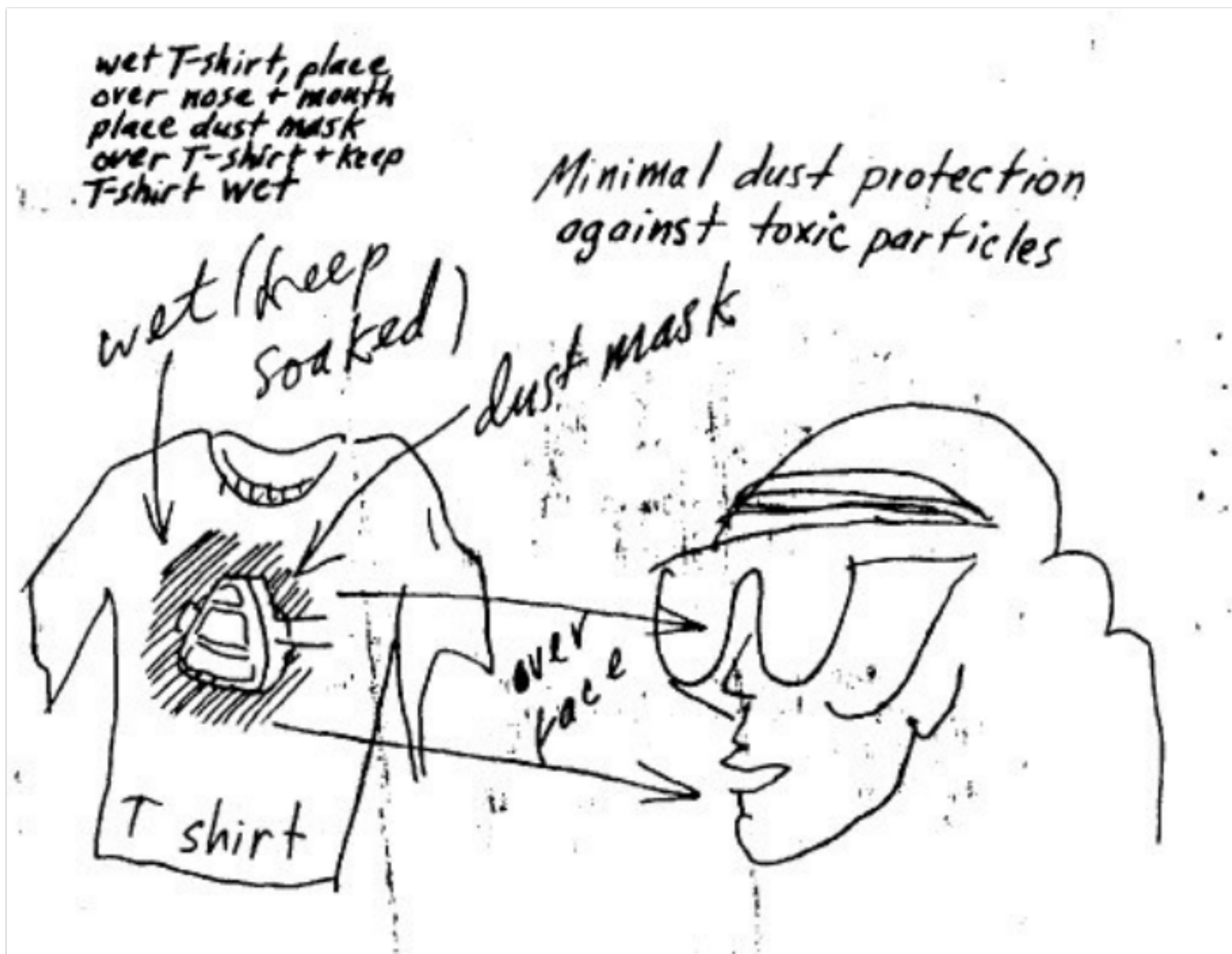
The first thing to do if you want to go public, is set about cleaning up any eye sores. Make sure you have done as much prep as possible and have gathered the needed tools and supplies ahead of time. Clean up the front of the house, paint the fence and door, get rid of any graffiti, weeds, or trash. Take off any boards on the windows and replace them with windows. In some situations, you don't want to tip off the owner that anyone is living there, so you will only want to make subtle changes like cleaning up trash and weeds.

If you want to introduce yourself to your neighbors, a good way to do so is on a weekend morning when people are out and about, but a landlord or property manager isn't around checking up on the place. Work outside in the front of the house. Be friendly and introduce yourself. If they ask how you got into the house, you may not want to tell them you are squatting. Sometimes you can just say that you are in the process of becoming the owner, and that it's a complex legal situation, or that you are living there in exchange for doing work on it. Make sure you know what you are going to say before you start talking and that everyone you live with is on the same page and has the same story. Whatever you say should be based in the research you have done on the house. Know there is a high chance that some of the neighbors may know more about the house and the owner than you do. If you can't talk to the neighbors without boldfaced lying, then this approach maybe isn't the best. Make sure to assure the neighbors that you just want a quiet and safe place to live. Sometimes saying as little as necessary is the best thing to do. Don't offer up too much information to anyone. Ask them about themselves and the block. Make small talk and offer your help if they need anything. Find out if there's anything that bothers them that you can take care of or help with. Do your best to get on folks' good sides. Assure them that you are not going to cause problems, and all you want to do is fix up this old eye sore on the block.

Making your move-in day appear 'normal' by unloading a van or moving truck of house-worthy stuff makes you look pretty legitimate, though it's definitely a bold move and very public. This may grant you some leverage with the police if it comes down to it. You will

draw a lot of attention towards yourself, and flushing out conflict with your landlord may come sooner than later as a result of this tactic. It is a gamble to know how the owner will react, and it can be hard to know how closely the house is watched. It depends on your situation - whether or not you want to kick the bee nest off the bat, or if you want to ease in to it and see how long you can fly under the radar.

When you are starting a house, be aware of the season. It is easier to get sympathy and resist eviction in the winter, but the stakes are much higher if you do get evicted. The longer you are in the house, the harder it will be to get you out. Often what has worked, is moving into a house in the Spring. That way, you'll have plenty of time to work on it and get it ready for winter. Also, if you make it to the winter, there is a high chance you can make it through. But be aware - as the weather warms up and construction season approaches, there may be a renewed effort to get you out.



well. You want to cap this pipe to make sure that sewer gas doesn't vent into the room. Floor drains have p-traps, but if they are not used often, the water can evaporate. Pouring some water into fixtures that haven't been used is some time can often fix the problem.

To free an obstruction in a pipe, you can take a few approaches. You can use a snake, which is a tool designed to go inside pipes and physically remove clogs. Sometimes, chemical agents like Drano can clear pipes up. You can locate clogs by listening as water flows down the pipe. You should be able to hear the difference in flow before and after the clog. If you have located the clog, you can try to cut out the pipe and replace it with new pipe.

Often, if pipes have bursted and have not been scrapped, it is easier to shut off the water to the damaged section, than it is to repair the pipes. There are cut-off valves that you can locate and turn off. Sometimes the valves are in bathrooms or kitchens, and sometimes they are in the basement. If they are in the basement, it's helpful to do this with two people; have one person trying the valves, and have another person upstairs with faucets on seeing if the water's running or not. Plumbing always splits in the basement. Cold water runs directly from the basement to the faucets, showers and toilets. Hot water runs to the boiler to be heated, and then up to the rest of the building. It's best to shut off the water before it gets to the boiler, in order to simplify the whole system.

The water from the garden house can taste nasty, and probably isn't great for you. Fill up jugs of water to drink from after you have done dishes or used a decent amount of water that has run through the hose. The less time the water spends sitting in the hose, the better and less plasticky it will taste.

To install more permanent plumbing, you can use PEX, which is plastic pipe that is semi-flexible. PEX isn't up to code in NYC, though in many other places it is. The authors don't have much experience with PEX, but it is much simpler than copper and there are plenty of resources online. You can often scavenge enough copper pipes from the house. A plumbing torch, flux, and the other needed tools are relatively

store adapters or a hose clamp. If the pipes look ok and you think there are just a few leaks, turn the water on and inspect the house for the leaks. If there are leaks in the pipe, turn off the water and go about repairing or capping the damaged areas. Make sure you shut off the water to any areas that you're not using (like the hot water system, or any other systems/areas you don't use). Do this by looking for valves along the pipes. They are often in the basement before the pipes go up to apartments, or sometimes in bathrooms or kitchens under sinks.

Once you get the water on, take a hose and run water down the toilet (whichever toilet makes the most sense to use). Trace the sewer pipes down to the basement. You will hear the water running through. Make sure there are no leaks or clogs. Let the water run for some time to make sure that it doesn't build up from a clog. Once you are sure that the sewer pipe is clog and leak free, you can start using it. You can hook up the hose to the sink, and disconnect the pipe under the sink and replace it with a bucket. Flush the toilet by dumping the water from the bucket into the toilet bowl (aka a bucket flush). This way, you can have a working sink, and then use the grey water to flush the toilet. Not only does this save water, but it means you don't have to pick between a sink or a toilet.

If there are clogs in the pipes, you can try to unclog them. The first thing to do is check the vent pipes. All pipes vent on the roof. This allows the waste water to flow down them. If pipes are not vented, a vacuum is created and the water will glug down the pipe very slowly, or not at all. This effect is similar to when you are pouring water out of a jug with a narrow opening. On the roof, the vent pipe will usually be the same size and material as the waste pipes. Not only is the vent pipe important for allowing waste water to flow, but it also functions to avoid build-ups of pressure and releases sewer gas from the pipes outside. In order for the sewer gas that is in the waste pipes to vent out the roof and not build up in the pipes or vent into the house, every fixture should have a p-trap. A p-trap functions to create a seal with water, so gas cannot escape into the house. If your house has a sink or toilet that has been torn out, there is a high chance that the trap was torn out as

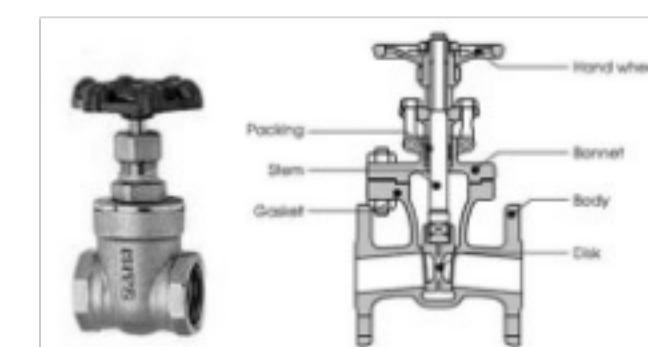
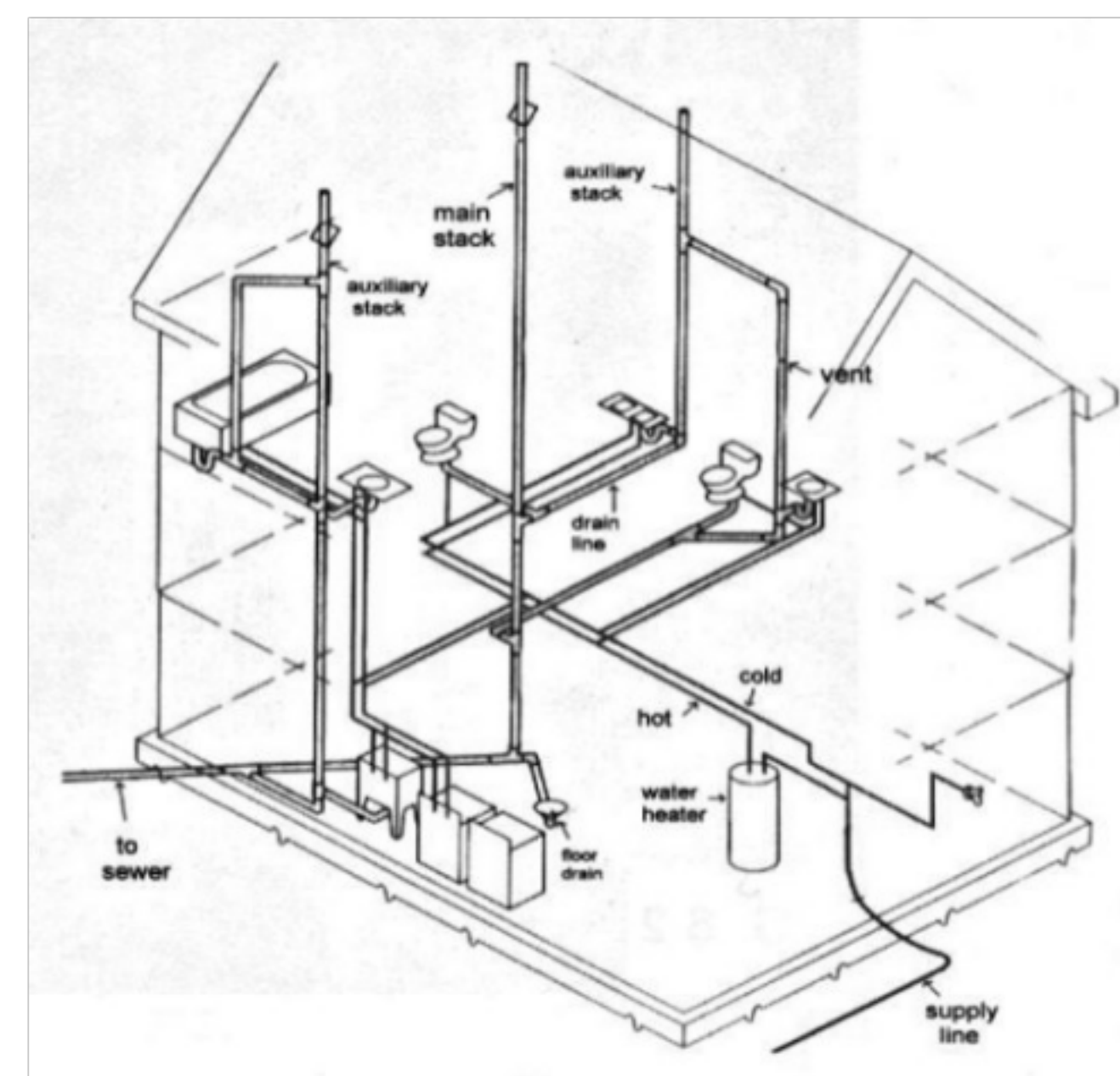
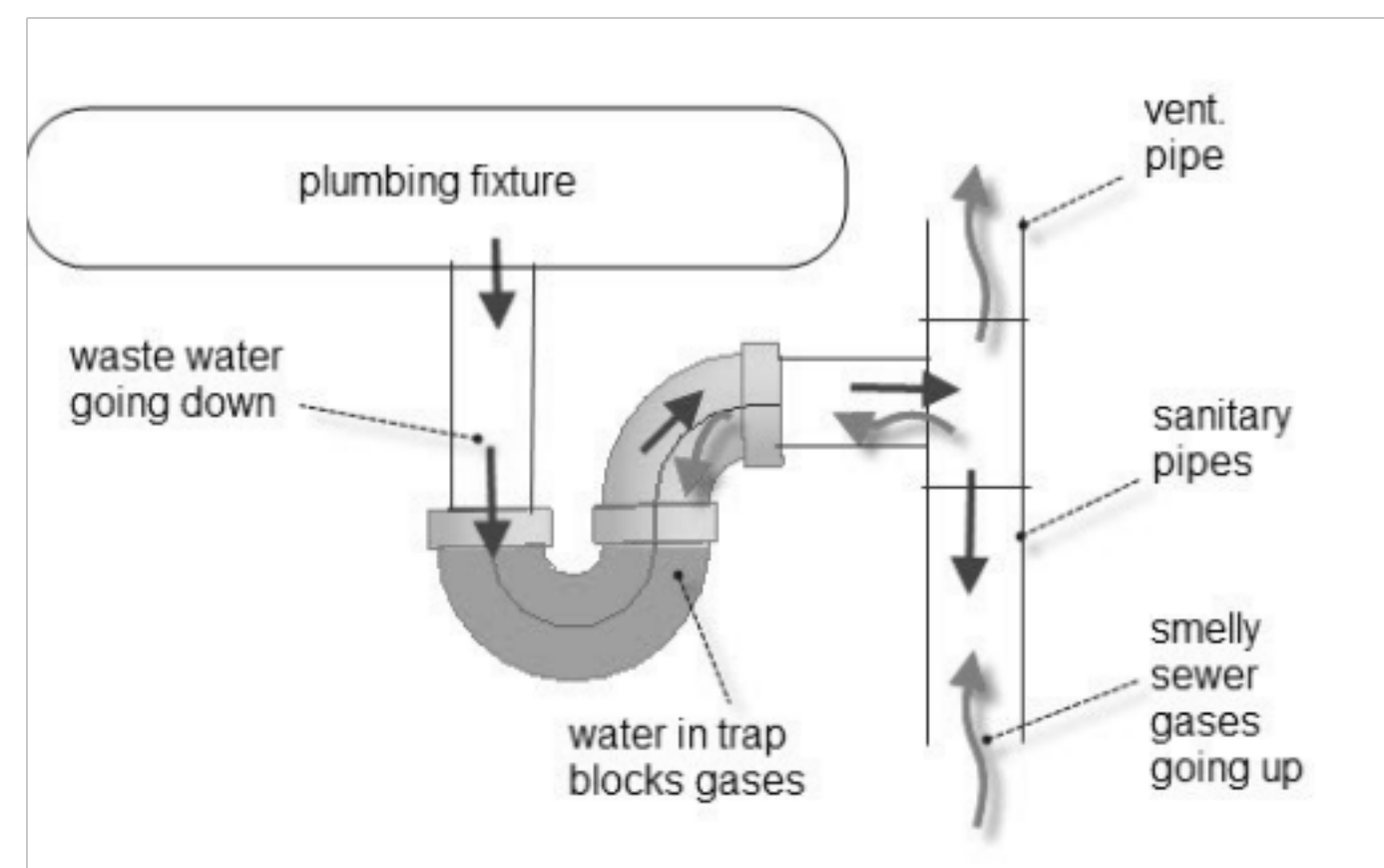
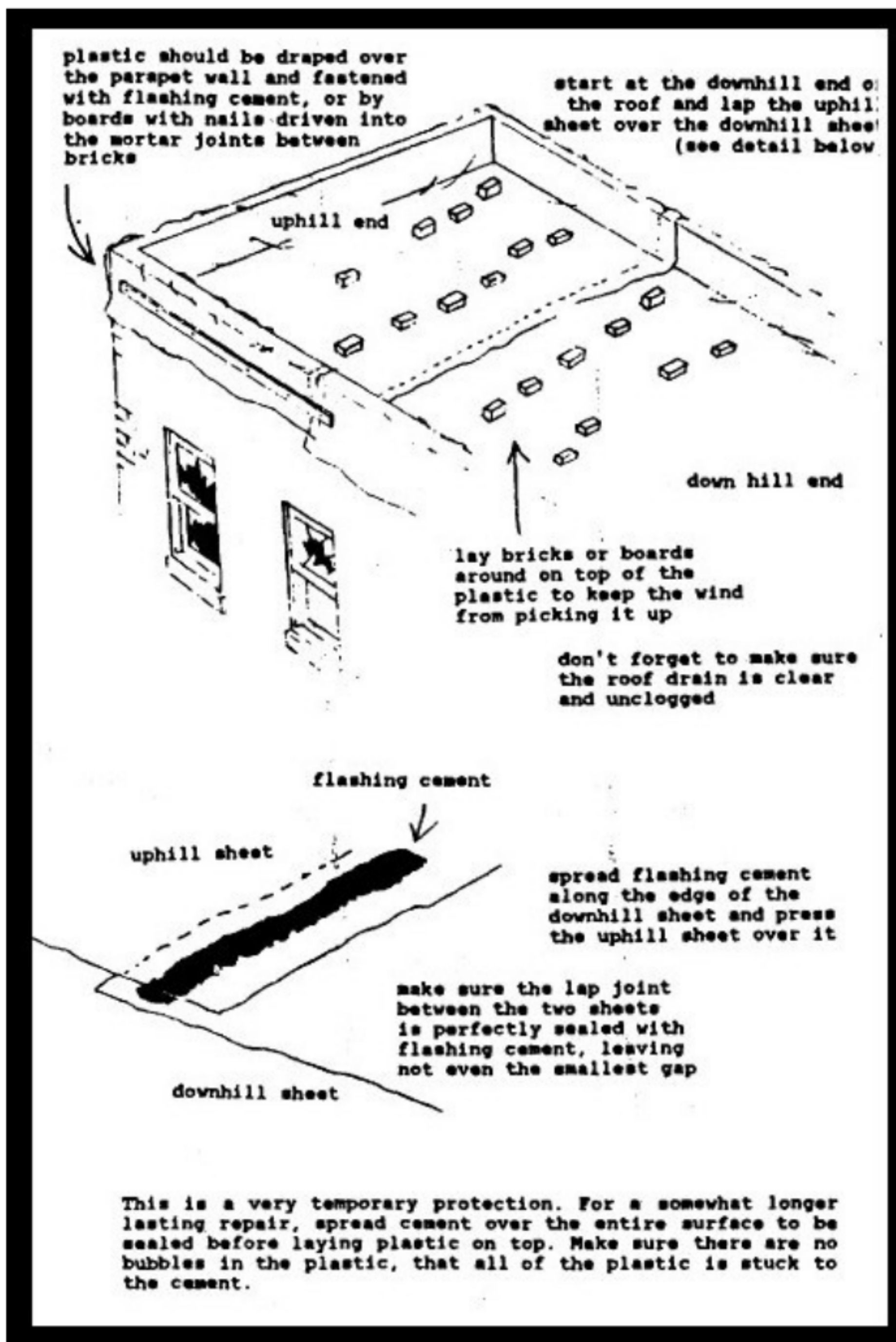
5. EMERGENCY REPAIRS

In most cases, the most important repair that abandoned buildings need is work on the roof - which will almost certainly leak. For your own comfort, it may only be necessary to locate a room into which there is no leakage. However, a building in which the roof leaks will have lots of spaces in which no one will be able to live. You want to avoid squatting in a building such as this, because the more people you have living in your building, the better your chances of resisting eviction and protecting yourself against hassles from the landlord, developer, or police. The more people you have, the more comfortable and secure you can make your place.

The long-term maintenance of a building depends more on the roof than on any other single thing. If the roof is not maintained, it will eventually rot until it collapses. The floors will go, and sooner or later, the exterior walls will collapse. Then what you've got is a pile of useless, rotten timber and broken masonry - which will be much easier to build a new expensive condo on.

Clear the roof of any debris and sweep it clean. Patch the holes. You can lay 5/8 inch thick plywood boards over them. Try using mineralized felt paper and roofing tar as a way of patching holes. Check the house for roofing tar; it's a common thing to be found hanging around buildings.

If repairing the roof is too big of a project to take on right away, you can use polyethylene plastic sheeting to protect the roof temporarily. Get a hundred-foot roll of 4 mil plastic that is twenty feet wide, and a couple of buckets of flashing cement. Be sure to get flashing cement, because other kinds of roofing tar won't do the trick. If you can't get plastic, or you have access to other stuff like large amounts of vinyl or other waterproof things that seem thick enough, that could also work OK. Begin by clearing and sweeping the surface of the roof clean. Fill or cover up all the holes. Make sure that the roof drain is clear and unclogged at all times. Clogged drains allow for buildup of wet debris and make a great environment for mosquitos and rot. Unroll the plastic so



8. UTILITIES

Turning on the water in a building is often easy. Find the water meter and water pipes located in the basement. Water pipes are made of copper or lead and are smaller than sewer pipes. Find the water valve closest to the wall where the pipe enters the house. It's important to be extremely gentle with this valve, because if it breaks, you will have no way of shutting off water into the house. If this valve breaks, you're fucked. Don't force it. Spray some WD-40 onto it and let it sit, then very gently open the valve. If the water is on, you will hear it when you open the valve. If the valve is still not moving, try loosening the packing nut. If you don't hear the water, that means the valve from the water main to your house is shut. This valve is controlled by the city. There are ways to access it, but you need a specialized wrench. When checking to see if the water is on, just open up the valve a little, then close it right away to avoid having water spray out of potential leaks and uncapped pipes.

If the water is on, check the water meter. There are several ways for water meters to be read by the city. Older meters have to be read on the gauge displayed in the basement. Newer meters have a wire that runs to a small gray box that sits street side, from which the city collects data. It is worth talking about how you want to approach turning on the water as a house; if you want to steal it, or pay for it. Stealing the water is lower profile and less likely to alert someone that people are living in the building, but there may be consequences if you're found out. Opening a water account can give you legitimacy, and perhaps a legal leg up. If you want to stop the meter from being read, find the gray wire that runs from the meter to the street and cut it with insulated cutters. It often makes sense to open up a water account in your name a month or two down the road. Using water in the meanwhile most likely won't be a problem.

To check your pipes, follow them up from the basement and see how intact they are. Often pipes have been scrapped. If the pipes are scrapped or somewhat damaged and you need a quick fix, attach a garden hose to the pipe somewhere in the basement with some hardware

that the entire roof is covered. If you have to, cut the plastic to cover the entire roof evenly. Make sure the lap joints where the edges of the plastic meet each other are perfectly sealed with flashing cement, leaving not even the smallest gap. Drape the ends of the plastic over the parapet walls on all four sides. Lay bricks or boards on top of the plastic so that the wind doesn't blow it around. Fasten the ends to the walls with the flashing cement or with boards that have nails driven in to the mortar joints between the brick in the parapets.

This is a somewhat temporary protection, but if you do a good job, it should make it through the winter. Though, summer heat will certainly cook the plastic until it breaks apart. To make your plastic roof a bit more permanent, spread flashing cement over the entire surface of the roof before laying the plastic down. Make sure that there are no bubbles in the plastic and that all of the plastic is stuck to the cement below.

If you have leftover plastic, you can use it to seal the places where window are missing. Use lath (the thin slats with which plaster walls used to be made) to nail the plastic to the window frame, or staple it up using strips of cardboard as reinforcement. You can also use leftover plastic to make tents for your living areas; these can be really handy in the cold winter months in NYC.

Shore the place up. Close off any areas of the building where the floor or the roof is unsafe. Then, if you can't replace, repair or reinforce the damaged timbers, you can brace them with four-by-fours or pairs of two-by-fours that have been nailed together. Be sure to brace the damaged timber against something solid. Otherwise, you're just making the problem worse. The brace must ultimately be supported by a bearing wall or footing. You can brace down to a joist if it's near a load-bearing wall.

You can generally assume that brick, block, or stone exterior walls are load-bearing walls. Some interior walls (studs with lath and plaster) are probably not load-bearing. However, some indeed are. Just because a wall is not a load-bearing wall, doesn't mean you can take it out safely. Even if it is only a partition wall, it can't be safely removed

if there are walls in the corresponding places on the floors above it. Even if there is no wall above the one you're thinking of removing, you have to make certain that the floor joists above are not being supported by - or, as a result of settling - come to rest upon it.

Missing stair steps can be temporarily replaced with wooden ones. If there's no other way to secure them in place, drive nails through the top, and then go underneath and bend the nails' tips over so that they will hook on to the steel part of the stairway. Cover holes in the floor with plywood until you can get around to replacing the missing flooring.

To install ground-level/exterior doors, set the door frame in the opening and fill in around the edges with pieces of broken blocks and some mortar (a couple of bags of mortar mix should be enough for each door). Make certain that the bottom of the door frame is exactly as wide as the top when it is set in place. Otherwise, the door won't work. Use a board that has been cut to exactly the right width to keep the correct space at the bottom of the frame while it is being installed. Make sure the frame is straight up and down and not crooked, bent, or twisted out of line in the opening. If the frame you have is bent, you can straighten it with a hammer, laying it on the pavement and using a block of wood to protect it from getting dented up too much.

Install the frame so that the door will open into the building. There are steel tabs on the inside of the door frame that are meant to be bent out so that they will anchor the frame into the mortar joints in the block wall. As you fill in the opening around the door frame with mortar and block, be sure that the inside of the frame itself is filled with mortar and block pieces, because the frame is not solid by itself.

Holes in sewage pipes can be patched by a variety of methods, including fibre glass, auto body filler with window screen, and even roofing cement. The waste pipes have already been discussed: they should be tested to see if they will drain, but not leak. Until you've got the pipes working, you'll have to dump your piss and other waste waters in the storm sewer in the street. Don't dump your raw sewage (black water) into the storm sewer. The sewers lead to rivers! See Chapter 7

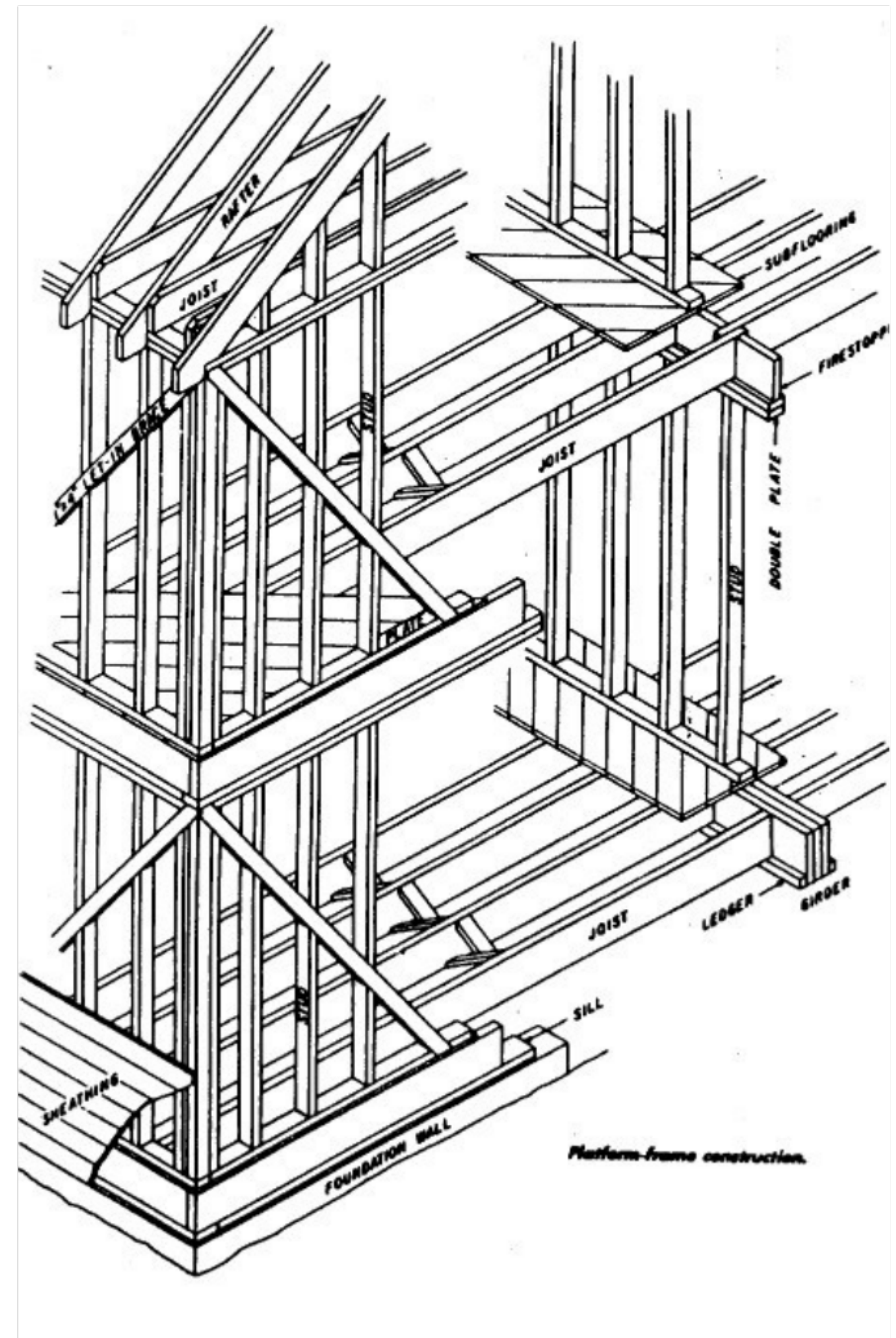
ranges made for boats and campers that look just like a normal stove top, without the oven attached underneath. These are powerful and small/lightweight and can be built into countertops to make your kitchen a little bit less haphazard and more official looking, while still easy to grab quickly if you've got to get out of your house on short notice. Hot plates can be somewhat sketchy, so be careful and never leave them on unattended. If you do have electricity, induction burners are a great alternative if you can find them used or on the cheap.

Windows and panes can be scavenged from construction sites at which buildings are being renovated, and from window suppliers that leave unwanted stuff out on the street. Doors can also be obtained in the same ways. Habitat for Humanity ReStore stores and other reuse stores are good resources for finding all sorts of stuff you may need.

use rat traps, try to use humane ones. There's tons of DIY catch-and-release rat trap instructions available online. Some rat traps and poisons can cause the rats to crawl away and die in hard to get places, and aren't very humane.

To make an alcohol stove, start with an empty can. Loosely pack it with cloth: gauze bandage is best. You will need something to set the can on so it doesn't rest directly on the burner. You can place a grill (an old refrigerator shelf will do nicely) on top of some bricks, or you can place the burner can inside of a larger one. For example, you could put a beer can inside of a coffee can (your pot would then sit on top of the coffee can). The larger can should have holes punched around the top with a can opener, so that when you put a pot on top, the burner won't be sealed off from the air. Punch holes around the bottom rim of the can to help the flow of air. You may find that holes around the top of the burner can are also needed. To fire it up, pour rubbing alcohol on the cloth until it is soaked, and then light it. The stove should burn for about 15 minutes. Never refuel while it's still burning, and never use anything stronger than 70% isopropyl alcohol as fuel. Enclose the whole thing in a metal reflector to keep the heat in and cut down on drafts. Otherwise, it'll take forever to get anything hot. If water accumulates in the gauze, just take it out and squeeze it dry. The fumes aren't the greatest and can cause respiratory burns, so try to use in a well-ventilated area and keep your animals out of the zone while it's burning.

You might consider using propane camp stoves with large tanks and hoses attached as your food-cooking device. They are very practical and economical. Coleman stoves are easy to find in most stores. You might consider using an ordinary gas stove; they are easy to find on the street, and you can put propane jets on them to make them work better. But, you should be careful that the one you're using doesn't leak. A camping stove is handy for traveling light, and is small enough to hide easily in a building in which there are security problems. Old RV propane stove/oven combos are also pretty small and lightweight, but using the oven on propane stoves sucks a lot of fuel. Also, there are propane



for shitting methods. If you have to dump grey water (dish water and other sink drainage) by way of the storm sewer, use biodegradable soaps/other products to limit the amount of toxic stuff you're dumping. Do not dump your waste waters out the window!

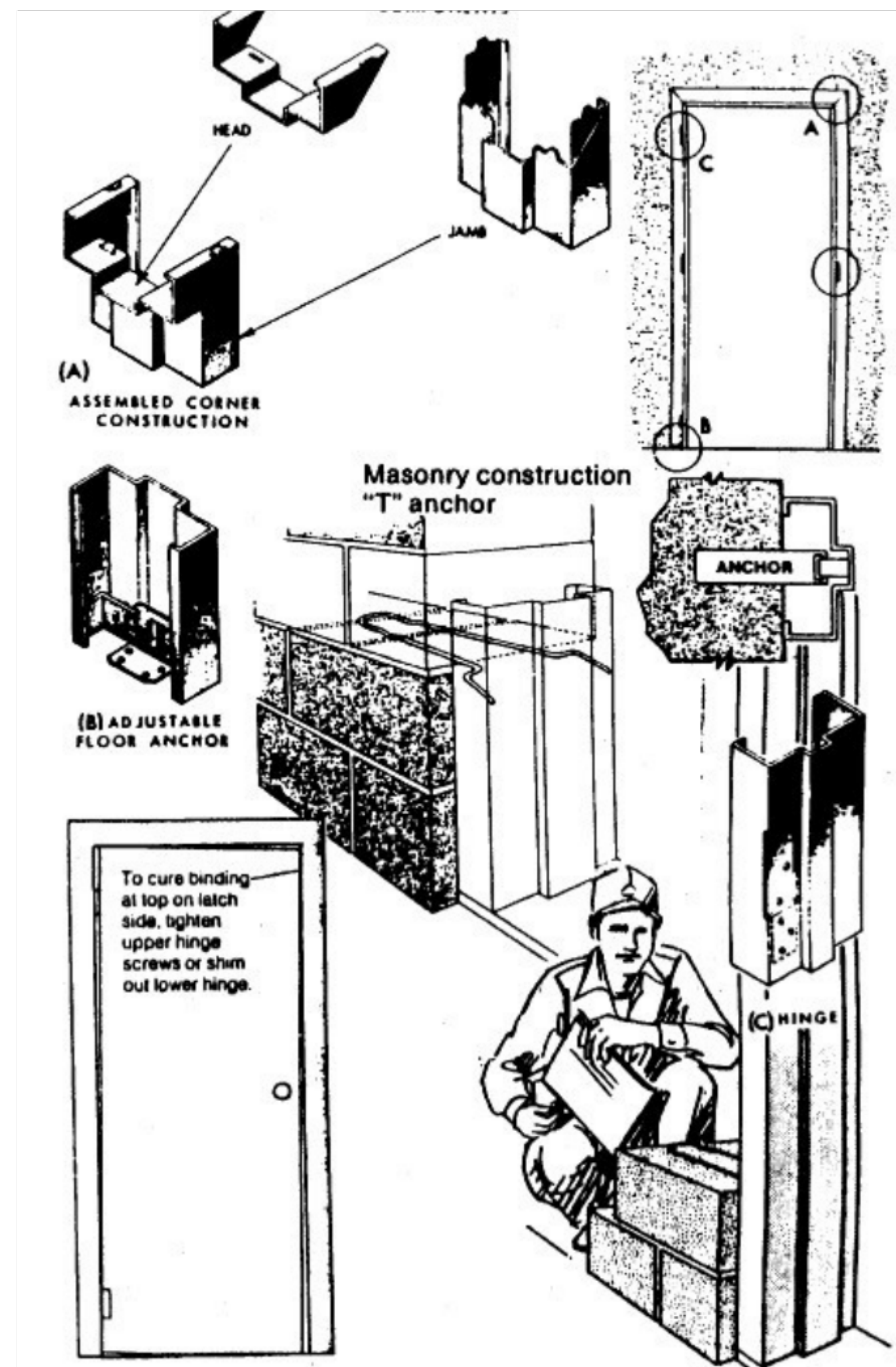
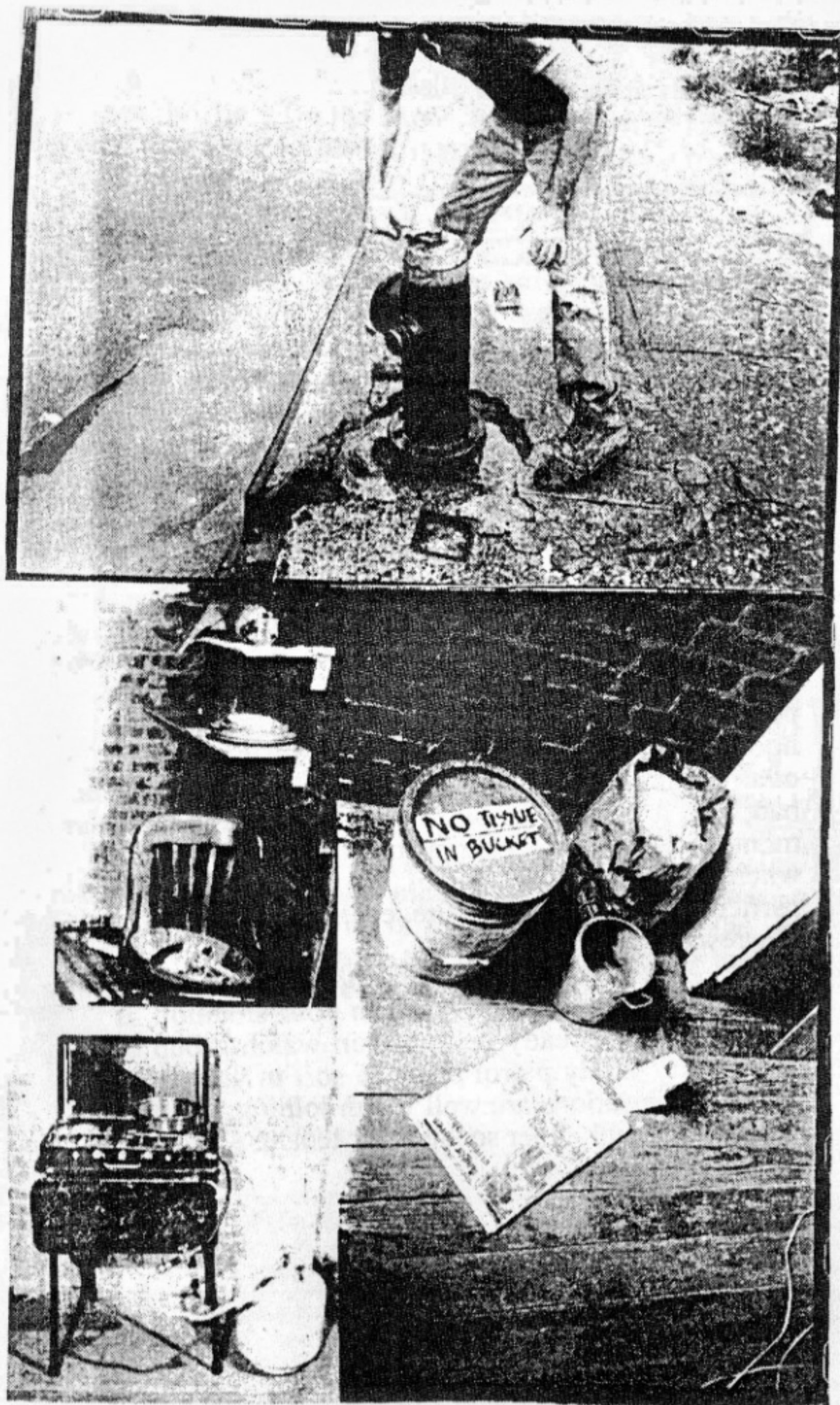
Houses will often require a lot of cleaning before they are pleasant to be in. Pick one room on the top floor and clean it. Use it as a base of operations. Then, clean the rest of the floor and begin to work your way down. Always start at the top! It saves you the headache of cleaning the same pathways multiple times. Don't throw stuff out of upper story windows, because you may draw justified complaints and hassles from your neighbors. If you are in a large building with a ton of rubble, you may have to take up the flooring in the same corner on each story and throw the unwanted stuff down through the holes. If you use the through-the-floor method, hang a curtain of plastic that stretches from floor to ceiling on each of the affected floors, so that dust or asbestos particles won't spread all over the place. Though, for most buildings, it probably makes more sense to just bag up debris and carry it downstairs. Always move debris downwards and towards the door. Make sure bundles are tied well and that there are no holes or leaks in the bags. Trash strewn on the sidewalk and a messy garbage pile is a good way to piss your neighbors off. Also, improper disposal of garbage means the Dept. of Sanitation could send fines to the owner of the building, tipping them off that you are living there. It can often make sense to devote one room as a trash room, where you store bags that you will gradually put out for curbside collection. You can put out 6 bags per collection day. If you have larger items, you can schedule a bulk pick-up on the Dept. of Sanitation website. The Sanitation Department will pick up 10 oversized items at a time, bundles of lumber, couches, bags and such. Make sure you read the requirements listed on the website carefully, and bag and tie up everything well. Working on a garbage truck is one of the most dangerous jobs in the city. Be kind and respect sanitation workers! If you decided to have a garbage room, make sure that it doesn't become a home for rats. Dispose of food waste right away, and keep rubble bagged up neatly and moving out of the house. It is often tempting to cut corners, but the more thoroughly you

7. MAKESHIFT TOILETS, WATER, AND COOKING

Before you get water turned on, you will have to use buckets or empty bottles for waste waters. Keep the buckets from getting foul by never putting toilet paper in them and by rinsing them with lime or a disinfectant. Construction sites are easy sources of empty five gallon buckets. As far as shitting goes, do it on a few sheets of the New York Times; wrap it up, put it in a plastic bag, and throw the bag into a trash can on the street. To avoid unnecessary hassles, do not use the trash cans owned by your neighbors. Pooping in bags is also totally OK. If you let your place get unsanitary, you can have complaints lodged against you by the Health Department, which will not only get you thrown out in a big hurry, but will also make hassles for other squatters.

If you can't get water, you can haul water inside or build a rain water system to flush the toilet. Keep a few gallons of drinking water in the house for back up, and find a nearby place you can fill up your water jugs. Often, gas stations have hose spigots. Some of them won't have knobs - to keep people from 'stealing' water - so it's a good move to get a spigot (sillcock) key for the valves. You could also get water from a fire hydrant around the corner. You can keep a gallon jug (with a screw top) in your bag and fill it up in a bathroom before you go home. Learning to keep extra water on you is really important.

Keep your food hanging in a bag or on a shelf hanging by wire so that mice and bugs and cats can't get to it. Do the same for your garbage and dispose of it every day. This way you won't get any mice or bugs, and your cats will only eat what they are supposed to. Even if you don't have power, using fridges makes good food storage (although a golden rule is to *never open a fridge* unless you are ready to clean it out all the way, right away!). You can often store food in large plastic bins, easily found outside Walgreens and CVS. Be careful of rats and other pests, as they can get out of control really quickly, and can be a reason to lose your building. They can also (amazingly) chew through those plastic bins if they're really desperate, so try to keep your stuff sealed-up well and surfaces clean too. Stuff steel wool in rat holes, and if you



clean the house, the better it will be in the long term. Most of the time, when people take short cuts (like filling the basement with trash) it comes back to bite you in the ass. Do it right, and do it once.

Mold is often found - especially in buildings with leaky roofs, and in almost every basement. There are many kinds of mold found in old houses, but none of them are good for you, and some of them have serious health consequences. Mold often grows in the insulation and drywall, close to leaks. The best thing to do is simply remove the moldy sections of the drywall, and pull out the insulation. You can replace the drywall and insulation, but don't do it until you have fixed the leak. You may also need to replace some studs/parts of studs, which is worth doing while you have the wall open. If you don't do a thorough job, the mold will just come back. Minor mold can be killed with bleach or hydrogen peroxide. But, if the mold is deep in the wall, the bleach won't do it from the surface. Wear proper respirators and use contractor bags to put the moldy material in. P100 filters are approved for mold and asbestos (they are the pink pancake looking ones). The plastic rectangular ones are for chemical fumes. Both filters work on the same mask (if it's 3M).

Many houses have asbestos in them. Asbestos causes cancer and other serious diseases. There is no safe level of exposure to asbestos fibers. Studies of exposure to asbestos suggest that as little as one day can result in significant damage to the respiratory system and disease. However, the health risks of asbestos come into play only if the fibers are released from the material and enter the air. So, don't agitate something that you think may be asbestos. If the material is in excellent condition and not in a living area, leave it alone. A greater hazard can be created than originally existed if the asbestos is removed by inexperienced people. Only trained asbestos abatement professionals should remove materials containing asbestos, which is typically found in boiler and pipe insulation, as well as some floor tiles. It may also be found in radiator covers, fire-proof doors, and certain kinds of light-weight construction blocks.

[Note added February 1997: On the afternoon of 9 February 1997, a small, accidental fire broke out on the second floor of the East Fifth Street Squat. The cause of the fire was a faulty electric space heater. The residents evacuated the building and left it in the hands of the Fire Department, which delayed in putting out the blaze, thus making the fire more damaging than it needed to have been. Once the Fire Department was through, the combined forces of the police and the Department of HPD conspired to illegally keep the residents from returning to their squatted building, which was deemed "dangerous" and demolished right in front of its former occupants within a day or two after the fire. The moral of the story seems clear: put your fires out yourself and trust the Fire Department as much as you do the police!]



closely surrounding the stove with at least a one inch spacer between the wall and the sheet metal to allow for air flow. Never burn painted, shellacked, or treated wood in your stoves; they give off poisonous fumes and gases. Make sure that your wood is seasoned (dried out). Hard wood is better than pine, and it burns cleaner with less smoke (which is good if you want to stay low profile). Be careful to not burn pressure treated or painted wood, as it's pretty toxic.

Since complaints can be made to the Fire Department about smoke coming from your squat, it is important that the smoke from your stove runs out of a proper flue or chimney. If your building has a chimney, make sure it is clear of obstructions. To see if the chimney is clear, you can put a flashlight in one of the flue holes. Then, take yourself up to the roof and look down to see if you can see the light. You can locate the chimney stack in your apartment; it sticks out into the room from the wall on either side. The hole for the flue in the chimney may be open, bricked-up, or completely hidden by plaster or sheet rock. If so, just chop it open with a hammer.

If you don't have a chimney, or if the chimney is blocked and you can't clear it, then you'll have to chop a flue hole in the wall, or run the flue pipe out a window. In either case, the flue pipe should go all the way up and passed the roof by five feet.

Fire extinguishers, smoke alarms, and carbon monoxide alarms are well worth having for your own safety, as well as in case any city officials manage to get inside your building and have a chance to look around for code violations. Place the smoke alarms so that the stoves don't set them off continually. Keep your place well ventilated - no matter how you heat it in the winter - and never leave a fire or a heater unattended. Sleeping with space heaters on is also pretty dangerous, so avoid it if possible.

Keep passages, halls, stairs, and fire escapes clear of obstructions. Place fire extinguishers, or buckets of sand or water, on every floor and in locations where they can be easily reached.

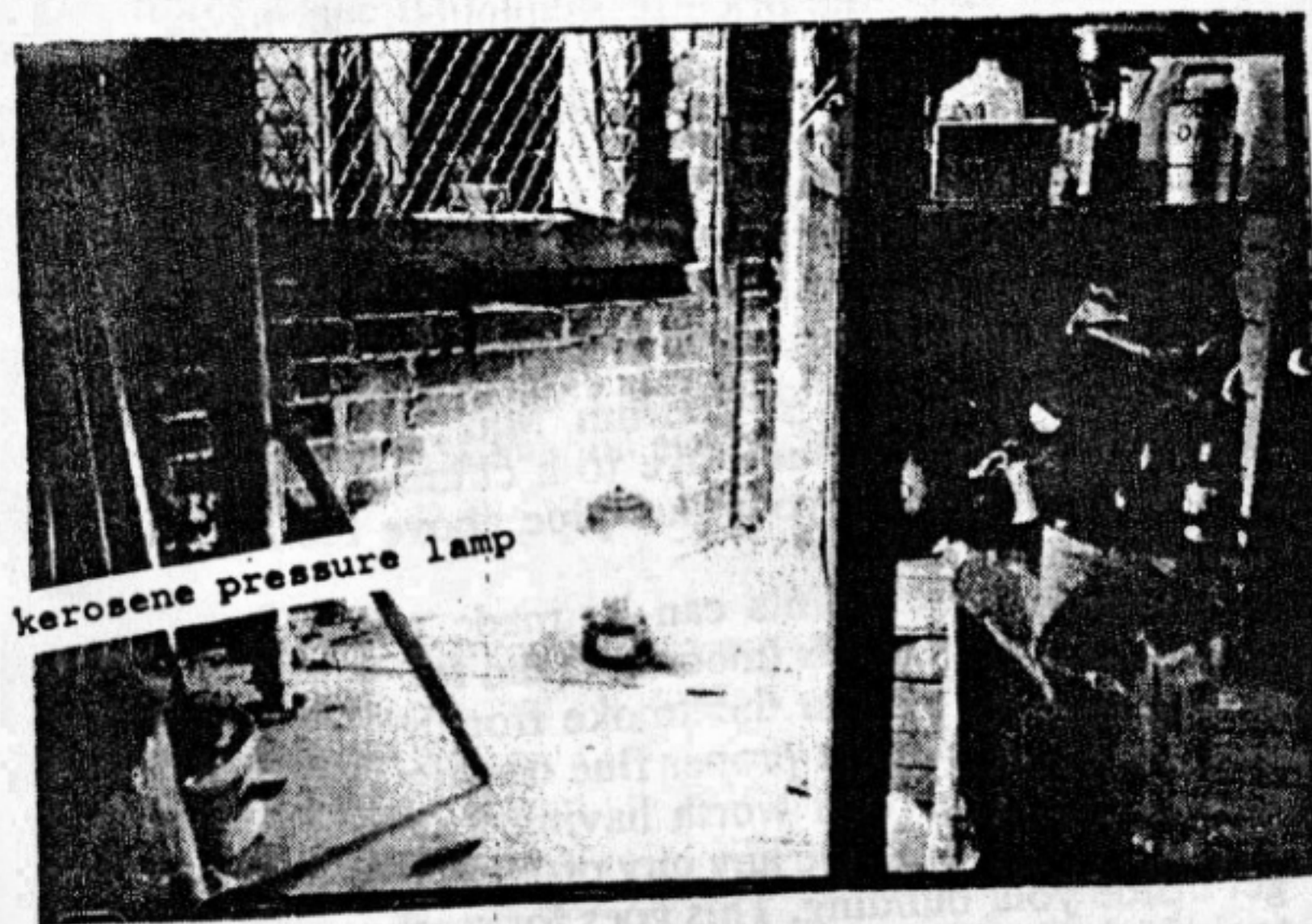
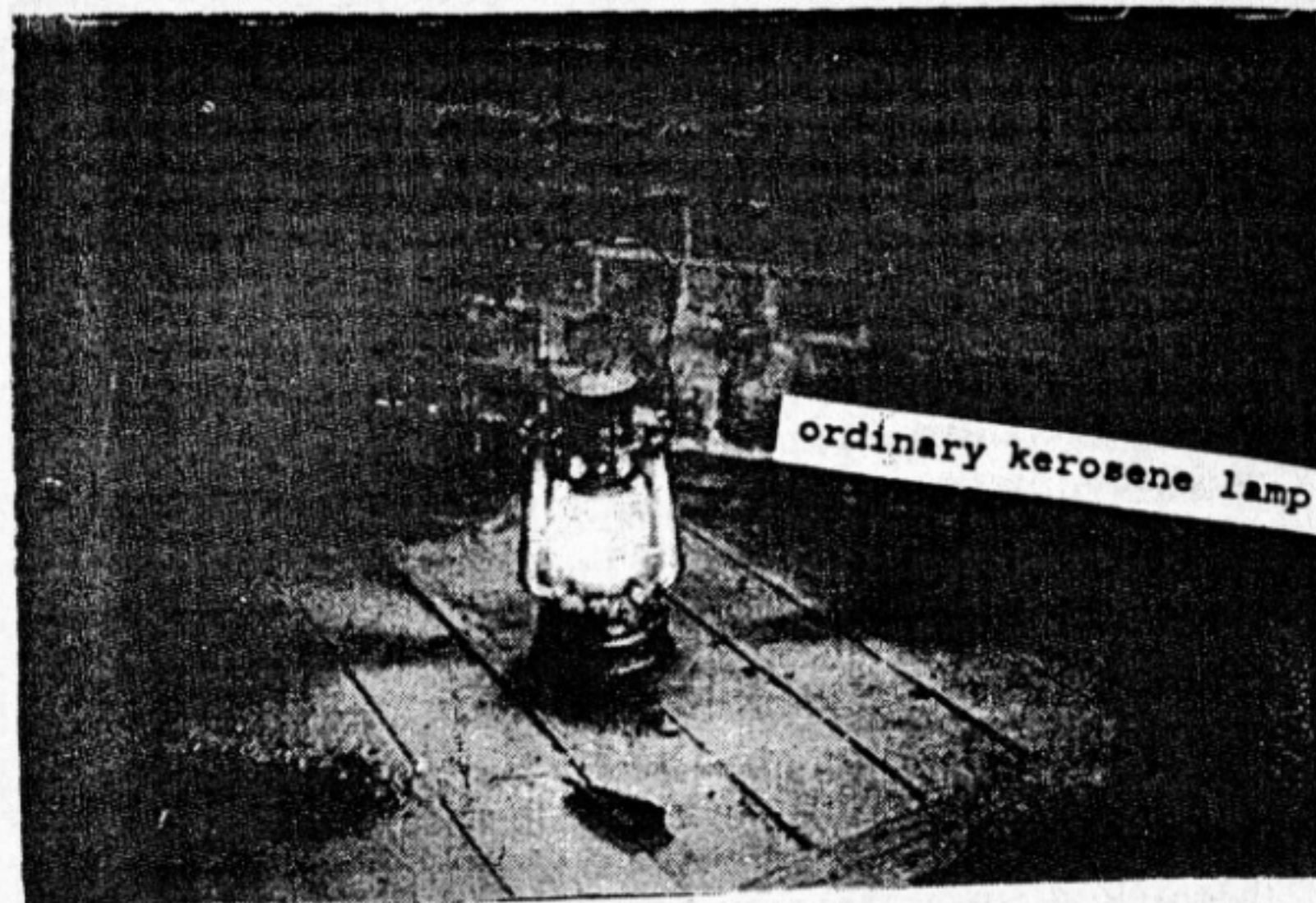
If you see insulation that is not fiberglass, is ripped, split, ragged, or powdery-looking, don't touch it! If you find yourself really needing to mess with something that you think may have asbestos in it, you can take a sample and send it in for testing via <https://www.asbestostesting.com/>, though the service isn't free (it costs \$30 for the first test and \$20 for each additional test). A good rule of thumb is to seriously just leave it alone, if you can!

If for some reason you must handle asbestos, be sure to wear disposable gloves and a respirator that has been approved for use with asbestos. A half-face respirator equipped with a High Efficiency Particulate Absolute filter will be sufficient. Keep the asbestos wet. The weight of the water will keep the asbestos particles from becoming airborne. Use a pesticide sprayer with soap and water (soap makes the water "heavier" and "stickier" for the particulates). During removal, have one person spraying the work area before hand, during, and also the surrounding area, while another person does the removal. It is important to cover skin as well. Seal any trash bags with potential asbestos material with tape or at least double bag.

If you have some work to get done, its helpful to write your plans down on paper, step-by-step, and keep track of any changes you make in the plans as you work. Make drawings or diagrams that describe and show how to do the jobs that are hard to explain in words; they will make it easier to organize and help get people involved in the project. Books such as the Reader's Digest Complete Do-it-Yourself Manual or Carpentry and Construction are handy for dealing with construction problems and can be found in the public libraries. We've found that books dealing specifically with roofing, electrical work, plumbing, and other "specialized" trades are also easily obtained. There are many good websites and a wealth of instructional videos on youtube as well.

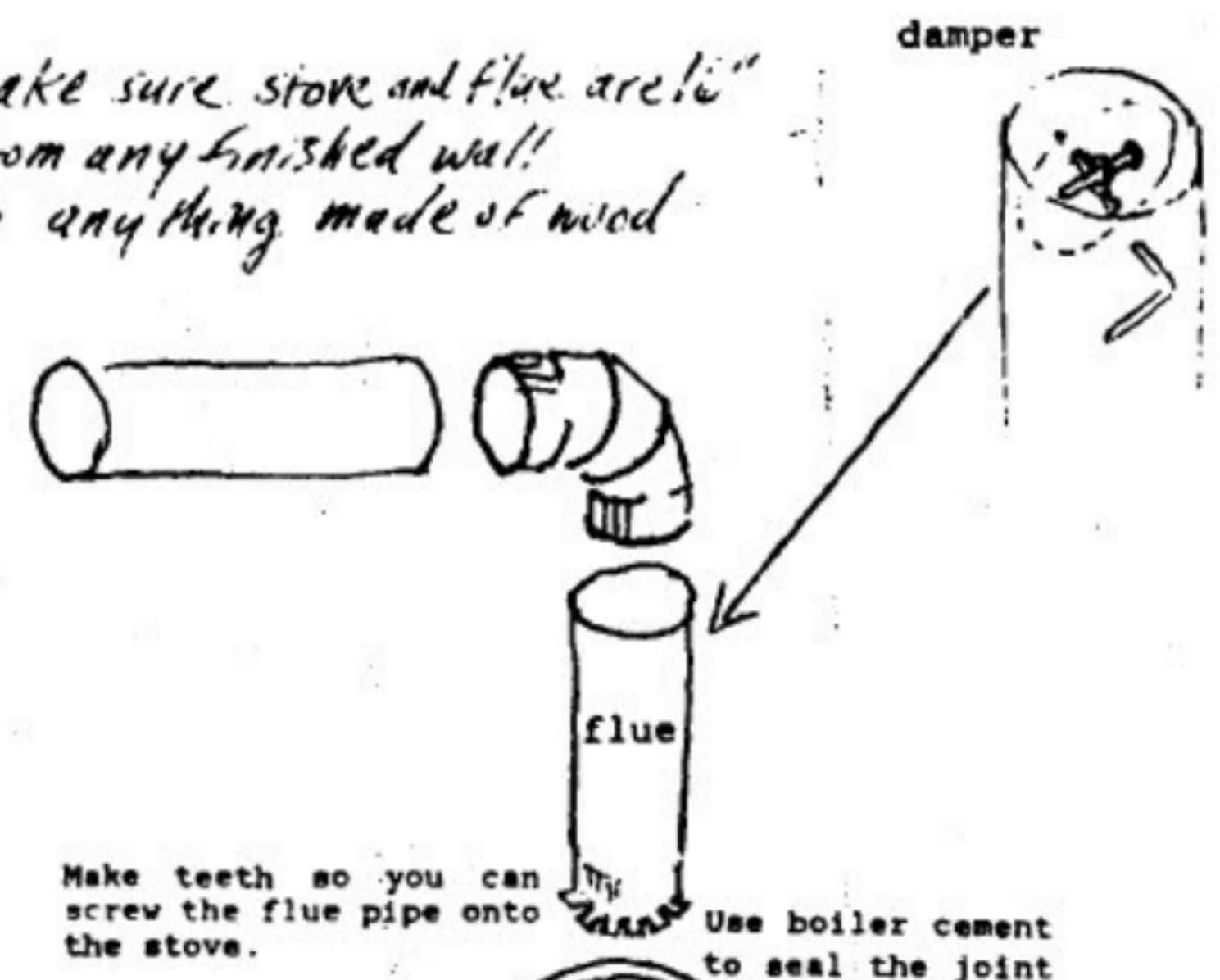
It's a good idea to take photographs or shoot videotape of the work you have done on the building, even if it seems as if you are documenting crimes you have committed. You're not! Before and after photos are helpful, and super satisfying to look at once the work is done.

Save your receipts for any materials you buy. Keep records of the jobs you did and the hours (or weeks, or months) it took you and your group to do them. All of this is documentation that you are a homesteader and not a trespasser, a vagrant, or a drifter (common stereotypes for squatters).



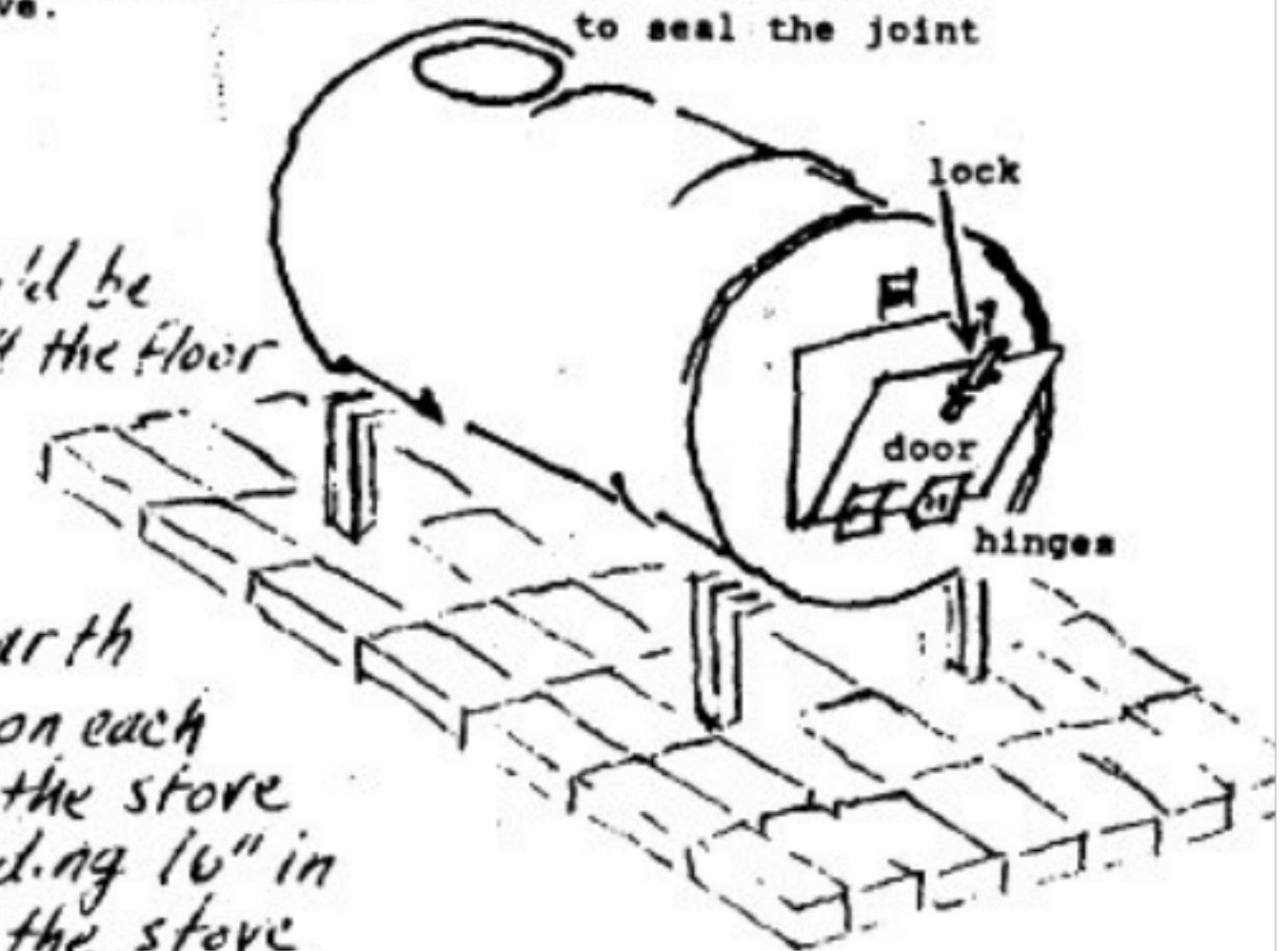
*cargo pallets
make excellent
firewood*

*make sure stove and flue are 16"
from any finished wall
or anything made of wood*



*stove should be
one foot off the floor*

*make a hearth
8" wider on each
side than the stove
and extending 16" in
front of the stove*



6. LIGHT, HEAT AND FIRE SAFETY

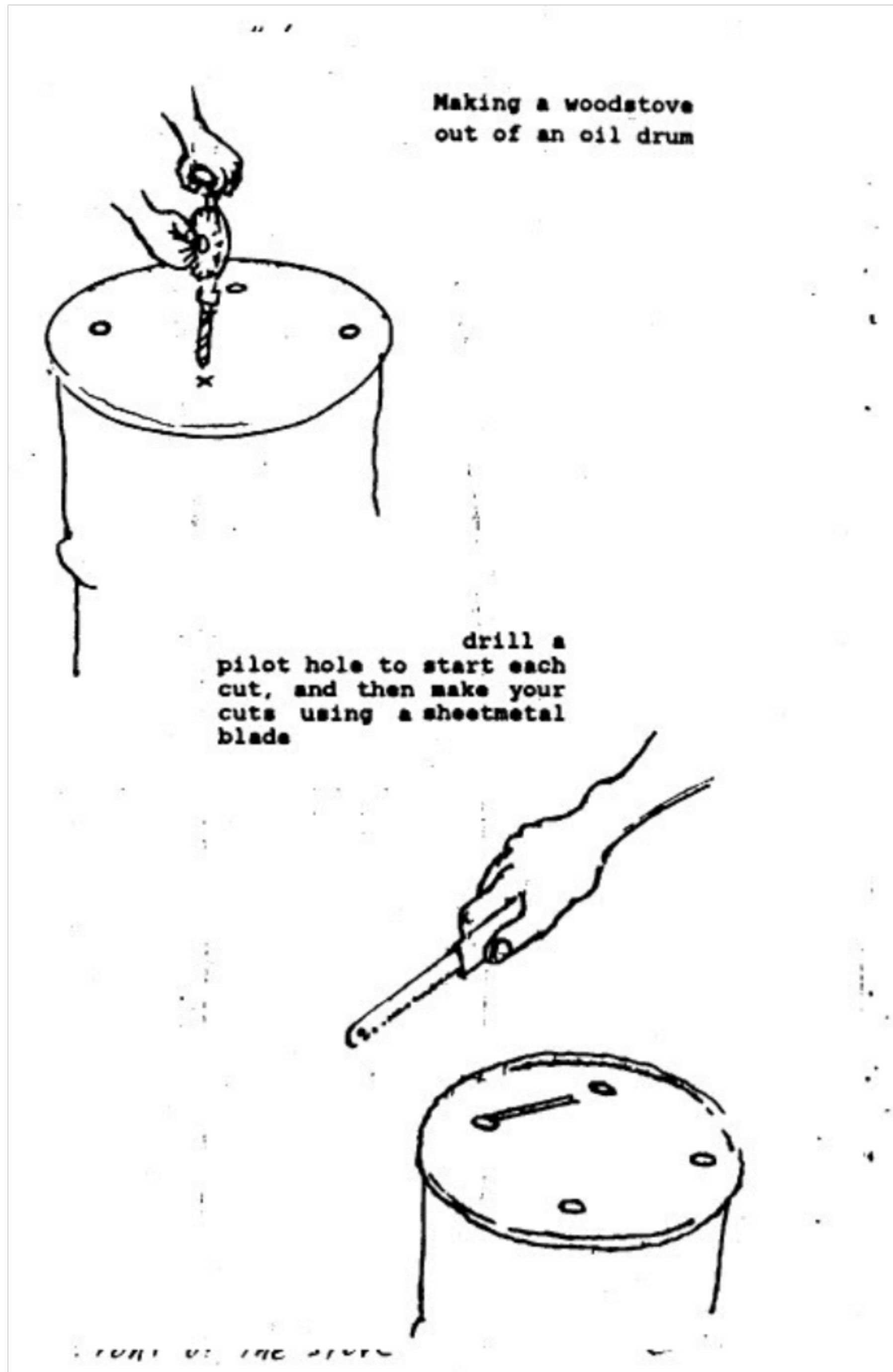
It may take some time before you can get the power on (if you can get on the grid at all). Until then, you'll have to find other ways to light and heat your space.

A headlamp is crucial for any squatter. You can get cheap battery-powered ones at any hardware store. These days, it's also easy to find all sorts of little battery powered LED lights you can use to light up your house. You can even find solar-powered LED lights and string lights. IKEA actually has a huge selection of battery-powered lights.

Candles are another way to provide light. The best kinds are in tall glass containers; the kind that often have pictures of saints or magic charms on them. They last a long time and are not easily blown out. The cold does not easily shatter them.

Somewhat better light can be provided by old-fashioned lamps. If you use them, trim your wicks now and then to make the brightest flame and the least smoke. Coleman lanterns generate light as bright as incandescent light. The kerosene type is safer than the gasoline ones, although they take longer to light. Kerosene is generally cheaper and easier to get than white gas. The regular old glass lanterns also run off of paraffin lamp oil, and burn slowly if you use them correctly. Wicks are dirt cheap, but can also be made by DIY methods with t-shirt or other cotton scraps and a needle and cotton thread. Paraffin oil burns much cleaner than kerosene, which is great if you're worried about fumes - though it's slightly more expensive. Lanterns, oil, and wicks can be found easily at most hardware stores.

If you decide to use candles or lamps for light, you must remain extremely vigilant of fire safety! We would encourage you to avoid the use of candles as much as possible. There are countless instances of squats burning down and killing folks. Never leave a candle burning when you leave the room. Never fall asleep with a candle burning. Be aware to keep exits clear and to have plenty of fire extinguishers dis-



tributed around the house. Fire extinguishers can often be found unattended at construction sites.

In New York City, heating is not merely a creature comfort in the winter; tenants can sue their landlords for not providing enough heat, and it is well known that there are deaths from hypothermia among people living on the street and in unheated apartments.

We think kerosene heaters - though they can be messy and fire hazards - are a practical and economical means of heating. Kerosene heaters aren't legal, but can be bought in the outer boroughs and New Jersey. It's worth it to get your kerosene outside of Manhattan, since the price will be much higher in this borough of the city. Please! Do not store your kerosene in rooms in which heaters will be operated, and never go to sleep with the heater on.

If you have electric, space heaters work great. The safest and most efficient are the kinds that look like radiators. Always plug a space heater directly into the wall outlet. Never use power strips or splitters. If you must use an extension cord, buy a new one and make sure it is rated for high currents.

If your space isn't insulated, then heating isn't going to make much of a difference. Put plastic sheeting over the windows, and/or duct tape the seams of the windows. Board-up any openings to the outside, and use expanding foam to seal up drafty areas. Hang plastic and/or heavy blankets from floor to ceiling to partition larger spaces into smaller spaces for better heat retention. Try to minimize all drafts. Put down thick carpets, repair holes in the walls, and try to make sure doors close well. It might be wise to pick one room that is the best insulated and put a heat source in it. You can then make that room a warm common space. If you have a cozy bed with enough blankets, you can sleep comfortably - even in freezing temperatures. Try to collect moving blankets, as they are easy to come by and good insulators. You can hang them on the walls to keep heat in, as well as use them to sleep under. When the weather gets very cold, a tent of some kind around your bed will really make a difference. Build the blanket fort of your dreams!

Get a wood stove if you can. It can be a very cheap source of heat. Wood stoves are also safer and healthier than kerosene heaters. If you can't find one, you can make one from a discarded steel drum. Start by making two holes in the drum: one to put the wood in (this one will need a door to keep smoke from backing-out into the air), and another for the smoke to go out of, and into a flue pipe (that you will have to make). The easiest way to cut these two holes, is to drill a pilot hole to start each new cut, and then make cuts using a jig saw with a sheet-metal blade. If there is no way for you to make use of power tools, you could cut the holes using a cold chisel. The hole for the flue must be measured to fit the flue pipe: four or five inches in diameter seems good to us. The swinging door will have to be attached by hinges that are located along the bottom of the opening. The door will also have to be lockable.

A damper will allow you to control how fast the fire burns without opening and closing the door (which is also a method of controlling the blaze). A damper can be made by cutting a round piece of sheet metal slightly less than the diameter of the flue. Punch two holes on opposite ends from each other in the flue pipe. Stick a piece of heavy wire through the holes and attach the round piece to it. When the round piece is in the up-and-down position it allows the smoke through freely, and thus stokes the fire; the more you turn it toward the side-to-side position, the more it restricts the flow of smoke, and thus the pace of the blaze.

You will need to set the stove on some kind of support that will keep it well above floor level. You can use anything you can find - bricks, old bed frames, etc. - as long as it won't burn or char. Make sure that whatever you put it on is insulated enough to not pass heat down onto the wood floor boards underneath. Some horror stories exist of floors getting so hot that they start huge fires around the stove. Putting a stove on sideways cinderblocks is a great and cheap way to allow air-flow between the stove and the floor. Try to position and install the stove at least a foot away from all walls, and install sheet metal (or something else flame retardant/resistant for insulation) on any wall

HOLDOVER PROCEEDING

From <http://nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/startingholdover.shtml>

Predicate Notices

There are many notices that are required by law to be served on the tenant prior to the commencement of a holdover proceeding, depending on the nature of the tenancy and the grounds upon which the proceeding is brought. They include Notices to Quit, Notices to Cure a Substantial Violation of the Lease, Notices of Termination or Notices of Intent Not To Renew a Lease. For example, a 10-day Notice to Quit is for a "squatter" or "licensee." Someone you allowed to stay with you without paying is called a "licensee." A "squatter" is a person who came in without permission and did not pay any rent.

You must purchase the appropriate predicate notice form and serve it on the tenant in the manner required by law. If you are using the 10-day notice for a licensee or squatter, you can serve it at any time.

Once you obtain the correct predicate notice, you should complete the form and make photocopies.

Predicate Notice

Petition

Service Copies

Notice of Petition

Postcard

The holdover petition must contain:

- 1) the interest of the petitioner in the premises;
- 2) the interest of the respondent in the premises and his/her relationship with the petitioner;
- 3) a description of the premises;
- 4) the facts upon which the proceeding is based; and,
- 5) the relief sought.

The Rules of the Court also require a petitioner to plead whether the building is a multiple dwelling, and if so, that there is a currently effective registration statement on file with the office of code enforcement, and the multiple dwelling registration number along with the name and address of the managing agent.

The landlord must make sure the tenant receives a copy of the Notice of Petition and the Petition in the manner required by law. The copies of the Petition and Notice of Petition must be served not less than five calendar days and not more than twelve calendar days from the court date. After serving the papers, the landlord **must** bring back the original Notice of Petition with the notarized affidavit of service on the back filled out. In addition, the landlord must bring in the stamped postcard so that the court can mail it to the tenant.

ILLEGAL LOCK-OUTS

From <http://nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/housing/lockouts.shtml>

If you have occupied an apartment for at least 30 days (with or without a lease), you may not be evicted without a court order awarding a judgment of possession and warrant of eviction against you. This is a violation of the "illegal eviction law" and is a misdemeanor. You may click on unlawful eviction to review the law.

If you have been forcibly or unlawfully locked out of your apartment without court order you should first call or visit your local police department for assistance. If the police are unable to help, you may start a proceeding in the Housing Court to be "restored to possession," which means put back in the apartment. You must come to court immediately and start a case called an "illegal lockout."

BEING SERVED PAPERS

-a hired process server or friend of the landlord can deliver papers

-Papers must be banded to recipient

-Papers cannot be served on Sundays, and can only be served between 6am and 10pm

-If personal delivery attempts have failed papers can be delivered under door, only after 2 delivery attempts have been made,

-delivery attempts must be made during different time periods throughout the day- ie: if the papers were attempted to be delivered during work hours, they should next be attempted to be delivered in the evening.

-Conspicuous service is when papers are left with neighbors, doorman, or other party in the house. If this occurs papers must also be mailed the proper way.

-every occupant must be served their own set of papers.

Settling the case

-landlord and occupant can agree to settle the case outside of the court through a written agreement, signed by all parties and brought to the court.

EVICION

From <https://nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/eviction.shtml>

The warrant of eviction authorizes the sheriff or marshal to perform the eviction. An eviction is the removal of a tenant and his or her personal belongings from an apartment. The marshal sees that any entrance locks on the premises to which the tenant may have access are changed. Before you can be evicted, the marshal must serve a marshal's notice, also called a notice of eviction.

The Notice of Eviction

Before executing the warrant the sheriff or marshal must give notice in writing to the persons to be evicted. The marshal may perform an eviction or obtain legal possession between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on legal holidays. The Notice of Eviction must be served the same way as a notice of petition and petition is served. To read more about this click on Service of the Notice of Petition and Petition. The eviction can occur on or after the fifteenth day after the notice of eviction is served.

Contents of the Notice of Eviction

The New York City Department of Investigation, Marshals Bureau, which regulates New York City Marshals, has required the use of a specific form for a Notice of Eviction.

Re-service of the Notice of Eviction

The purpose of the Notice of Eviction is make sure that the respondent has adequate advanced warning of an eviction. If the notice becomes stale after delivery, it can no longer be used.

Marshals are required to give an additional notice of eviction in two situations:

- 1) Where thirty days have passed since the earliest eviction date specified by the previous Notice of Eviction and the warrant has not yet been executed; or
 - 2) where a court order stays the eviction after service of the Notice of Eviction and the stay later expires or is vacated, unless the court specifically gives the petitioner permission to evict respondent without serving a new Notice of Eviction. In that situation the petitioner may evict without re-serving an eviction notice as long as the warrant of eviction is executed within three business days of the earliest date of eviction authorized by the court.
- The new marshal's notice must be served in the same way as the original notice unless the court orders otherwise, and must also give the tenant 14 days notice of the eviction.

Special Rules For Children, Mentally Ill, Handicapped, Elderly or Others

The marshal is required to find out in advance if the premises is occupied by any individual unable to fend for themselves, and if so, to notify the Department of Investigation before scheduling the eviction. The marshal must notify local police if unattended children are found at an eviction site. If, upon arriving at the premises, the marshal discovers that the tenant or any occupants of the unit are mentally ill, handicapped, elderly, or otherwise unable to care for themselves, the marshal must notify the Department of Investigation and the appropriate social welfare agency. The eviction must be postponed for approximately two weeks to give the appropriate social service agency an opportunity to provide assistance to such occupants.

Removal of Property and Animals

The landlord may choose between having the marshal perform an eviction or having the marshal obtain legal possession. In both, the marshal returns control of the premises to the landlord. For an eviction, the marshal must hire a bonded moving company licensed by the New York State Department of Transportation, and must direct the moving company to deliver the items removed from the premises to a warehouse licensed by the Department of Consumer Affairs. In a legal possession, the tenant's personal property remains under the care and control of the landlord until the tenant can arrange to transport the property to another location. If the marshal finds any living animals, he or she must notify Animal Rescue to remove the animals. The marshal is required to prepare a written inventory of all items contained in the premises of any tenant to be evicted. If the tenant is present at the eviction, the tenant has the right to remove any property or valuables. Property can also be released to a relative, friend or neighbor, if the marshal is satisfied that the person has the authority to take the property. Money found and taken by the marshal must be left in the custody of the local police station, or in the marshal's office if delivery to the police station is not possible. After the warrant has been executed the marshal is required to notify the evicted tenants of the location of their property.

Items Not To Be Removed

The following articles are not to be removed from the premises: food, groceries, dishes encrusted with food, any fixture so attached to the realty that its removal will cause damage to the realty, rugs and wall-to-wall carpets which are firmly affixed to the floor, linoleum or tiles.