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Sheriff To Stop Mortgage Evictions

CHICAGO (CBS 2) -- Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart announced Wednesday morning that he plans to suspend mortgage foreclosure evictions conducted by his officers, so that renters living in foreclosed buildings are protected.

As CBS 2's Jim Williams reports, the temporary action has been taken in the wake of the national foreclosure crisis. But the action was taken not out of pity for those who have defaulted on their mortgages, but to protect those who are evicted from their rented houses or apartments because their landlords have foreclosed.

In many instances, tenants can find themselves living in foreclosed properties and not even knowing it until they are evicted despite being current with the rent.

In one instance Dart mentioned at a news conference Wednesday, several families in were paying their rent diligently at the Albany Park neighborhood apartment building where they lived, and even assisting in upkeep. But the owner fled the country for Romania after being implicated in a fraud case, and the building was foreclosed. Thus, all the tenants were evicted.

Many mortgage companies have failed to exercise due diligence when requesting a foreclosure, such as identifying all occupants so that it can be determined whether the owner and the occupant are the same person. Instead, that is left to sheriff's deputies working at taxpayer expense, Dart said.

"These mortgage companies only see pieces of paper, not people, and don't care who's in the building," Dart said in a news release. "They simply want their money and don't care who gets hurt along the way. On top of it, they want taxpayers to fund their investigative work for them. We're not going to do their jobs for them anymore. We're just not going to let them evict innocent tenants. It stops today."

Dart said the sheriff's office is on pace to conduct 4,500 mortgage foreclosure evictions this year, compared with only 1,771 in 2006.

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