

NYC landlord's building work forces tenants to use fire escape

BY SARAH GABRIELLI GREG B. SMITH

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Residents at 167 W. 83rd St. in Manhattan are reeling over the bad construction being done inside. (GREGG VIGLIOTTI FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

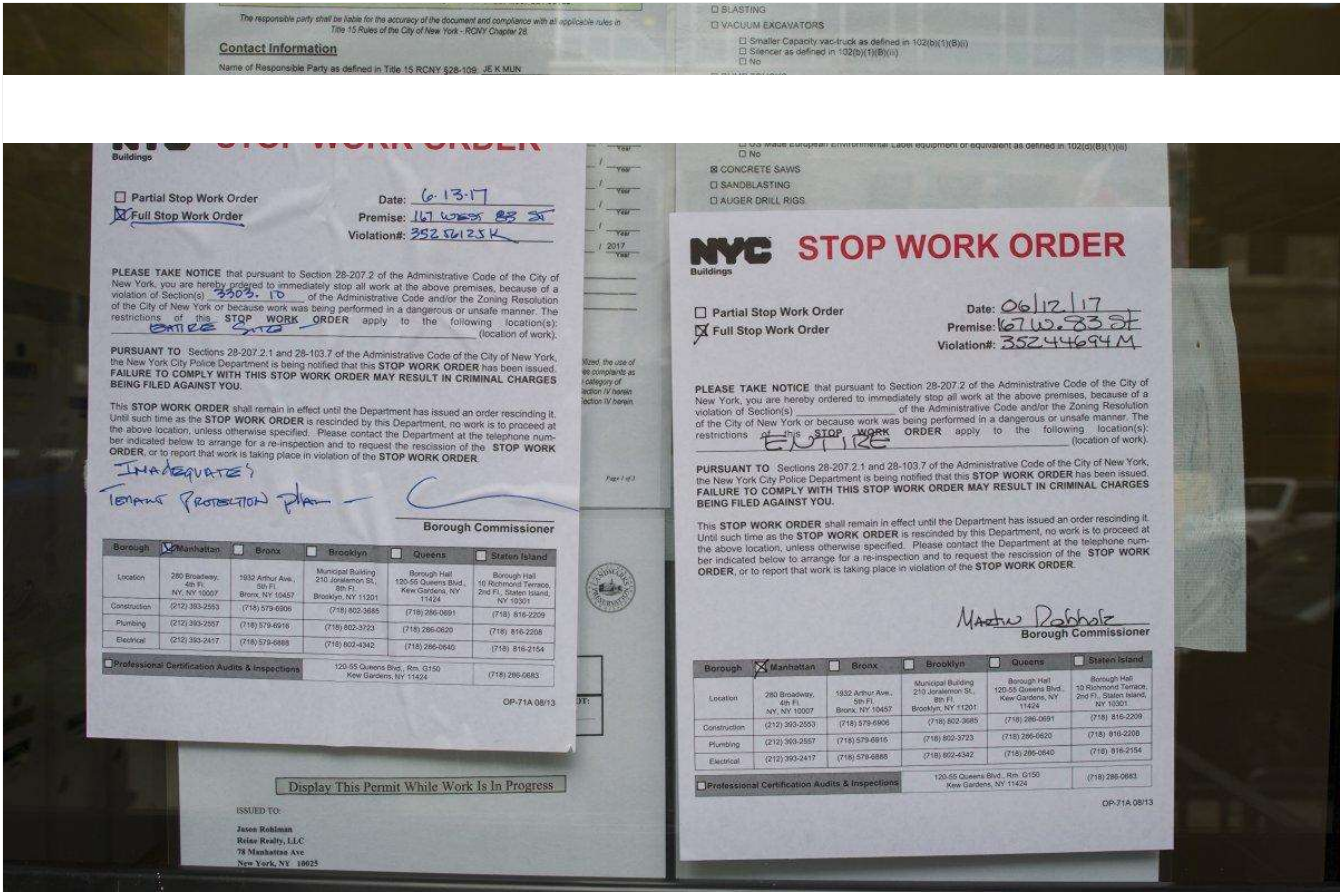
Tenants of an Upper West Side five-story walk-up recently got some bad news from their landlord — he was about to tear apart and renovate the building's only interior staircase. Then they got worse news.

The landlord told them the fire escape would be the only way they could gain access to their apartments while the work was underway.

"The whole thing is just kind of nutty," said Carol Maillard, 66, an actress singer/songwriter who moved into the building in 1977.

Several of the tenants of the landmarked apartment building on W. 83rd St. are elderly, which presents certain problems vis-a-vis clambering up and down rusty stairs or reaching a ladder that's 10 feet off the ground.

The landlord is Pine Management, owned by the brothers Daniel and Jason Rohlman. The firm is currently under investigation by state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman over repeat allegations of tenant harassment.



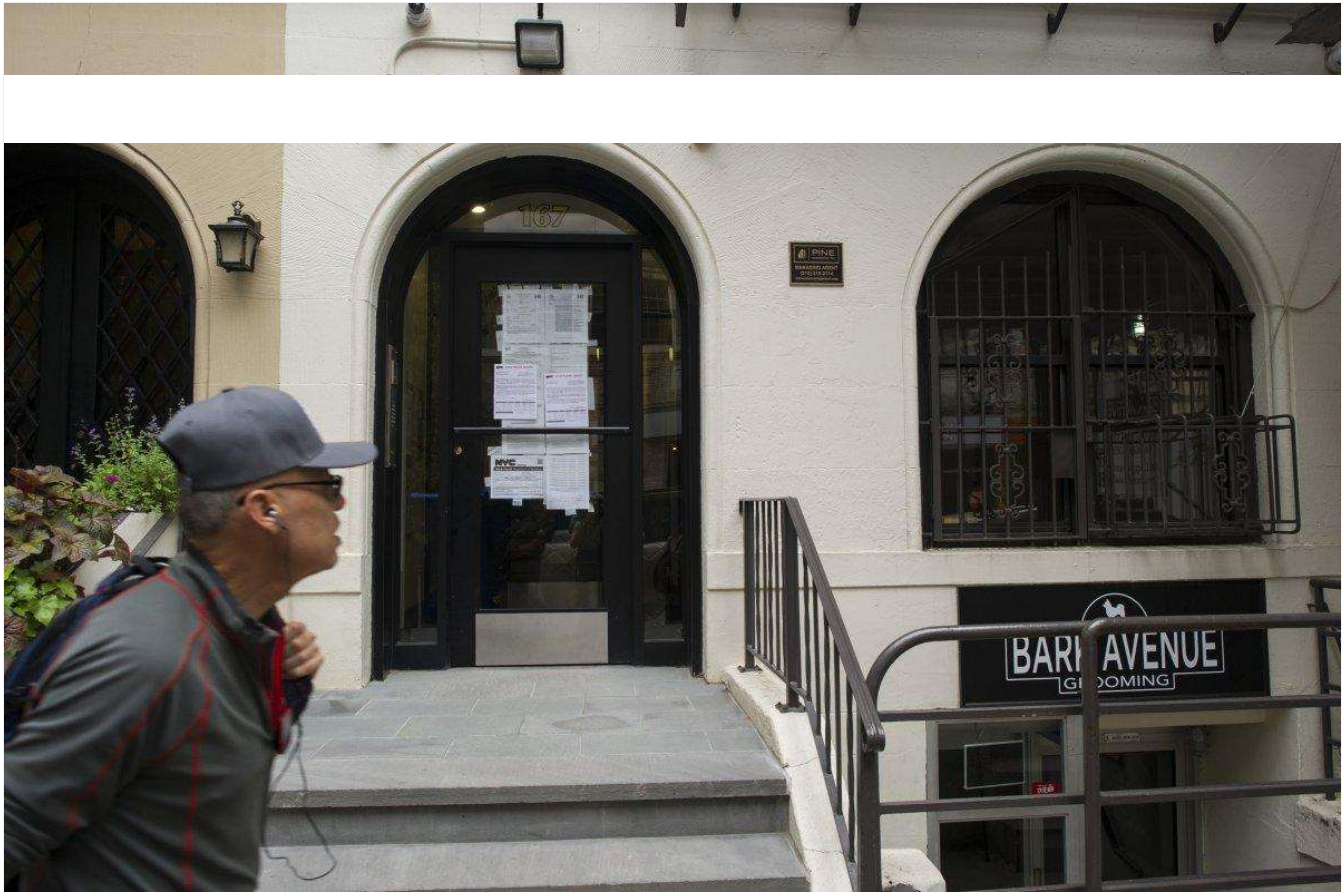
The landlord sent notices to tenants saying they would be renovating the building's only staircase. (GREGG VIGLIOTTI FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

“It’s insane,” said Joseph Soldevere, a spokesman for the city Department of Buildings.



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Half of the tenants in the building are rent-stabilized, and they say they’ve been pressured for years to move out so the Rohlman’s can rent to higher-paying tenants. Daniel Rohlman of Pine Management did not return a phone call seeking comment. The fire escape option materialized on June 1 when Pine Management sent a letter warning tenants of the upcoming “renovation.” Work, they were told, would take place from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on four upcoming June days. During those times, the letter suggested tenants “alter” their schedule to avoid entering or leaving the building, then added: “In the event you should need to ingress/egress during this period, please use the fire escape directly connected to your apartment.”



The landlord is Pine Management, owned by the brothers Daniel and Jason Rohlman. (GREGG VIGLIOTTI FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

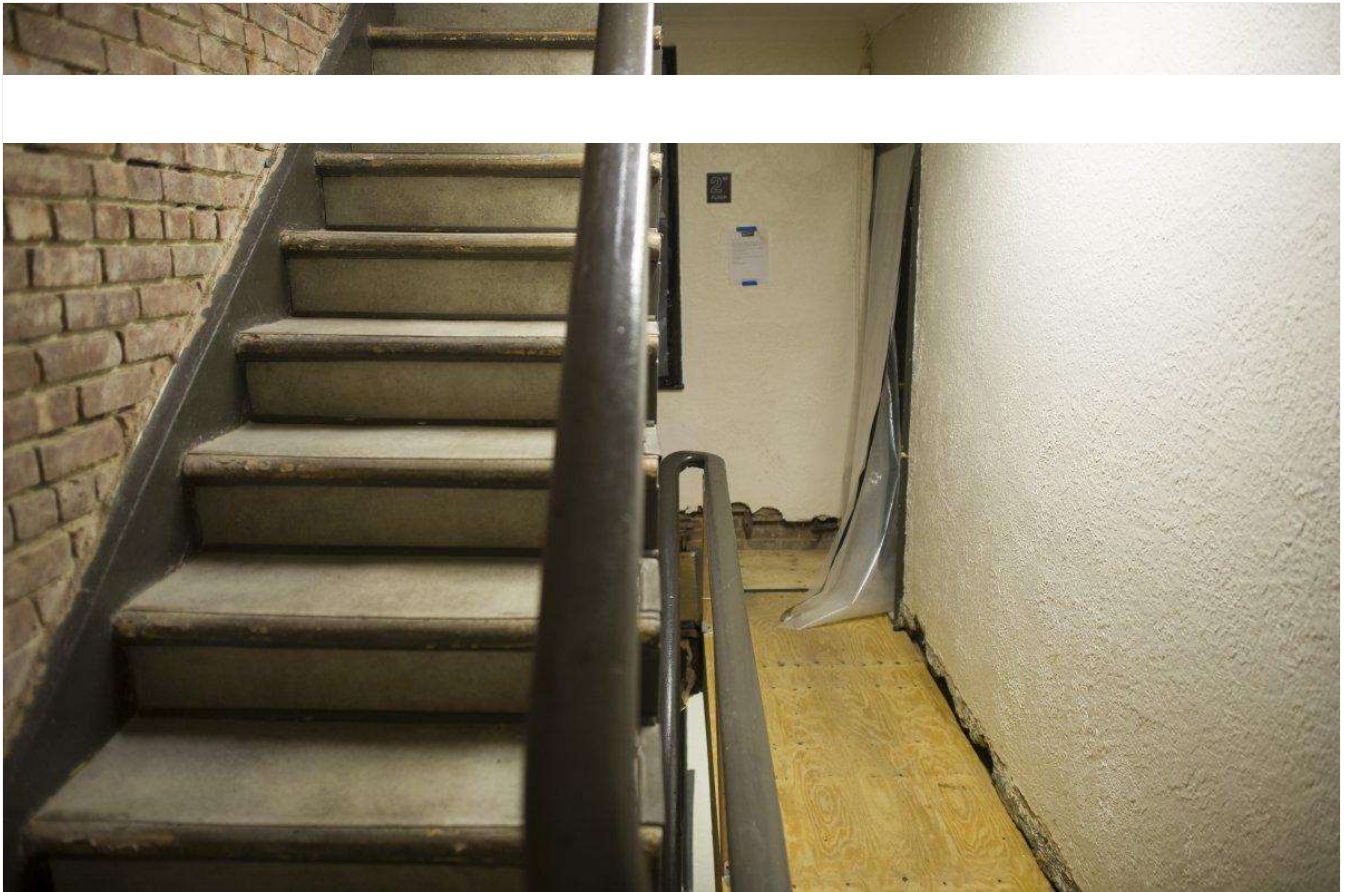
Last week they began tearing down the portion of the stairway leading from the fifth floor to the roof. Dust filled the hallways and one tenant said it “sounded like the building was coming down.”

That tenant, a 65-year-old woman who didn’t want her name used because she feared retaliation from the landlord, said the fire escape notice “sounded crazy.”

She said her fire escape “is not easy to access” and was worried because she would have to leave her apartment on one of the fire escape days to keep a doctor’s appointment.

Some of the apartments aren’t directly connected to the fire escape and tenants must crawl out onto metal grates that connect to an adjacent building called “fire baskets.”

A tenant in one of those apartments, who said her name was Janice, 65, said this was not an option.



Notices were sent to tenants saying they would be re-doing the staircases. (GREGG VIGLIOTTI FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

"I would either stay indoors or be out. Either way this looks real bad," she said.

Another tenant, who declined to give his name, said he would likely be at work during the fire escape hours, but worried about others in the building.

"If there were a true emergency and someone were home and needed to get out, that would scare me," he said.

The Department of Buildings got a complaint last week and showed up. Unaware of the fire escape plan tenants had to endure, the agency issued a stop work order and cited the building owner for failing to have a second egress during the renovation.

Workers were also ordered to install a temporary metal staircase from the fifth floor to the roof, but the buildings inspector at the scene worried about the staircase's stability if multiple firefighters had to descend from the roof.



The workers were ordered to install a temporary metal staircase from the fifth floor to the roof. (GREGG VIGLIOTTI FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

On Friday, the city ordered the owners to hire a fire guard to monitor the building 24 hours-a-day, seven days a week.

In December, The News reported that the state Attorney General had issued subpoenas for records from Pine Management. A spokeswoman declined comment except to say the inquiry was ongoing.

Councilmember Helen Rosenthal (D-Manhattan) noted that she's been fielding complaints of tenant harassment from dozens of Pine Management tenants, including those who live in the 83rd St. building.

"It's nuts to think that seniors would be able to use a fire escape on a regular basis to go out and get their groceries, go to the library," she said. "This is by far the worst (example) but it's clear that the building owner has been harassing tenants."

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