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# Lower East Side Tenants Sue 'Slumlord' Over Dilapidated Apartments, Intimidation Tactics

Steve Croman, one of NYC's most notorious landlords, has made life hell for tenants at 159 Stanton. Now, they're fighting back in court.

By Cameron Luttrell (Patch Staff) - (<http://patch.com/users/cameron-luttrell>) December 16, 2016 3:44 pm ET  
(<http://my.patch.com/article/26833095/edit>)

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LOWER EAST SIDE, NY — Despite bitter wind chills blowing through the city Thursday morning and patches of snow on the ground, a crowd of Lower East Side residents and passersby paused outside 159 Stanton St. (<https://goo.gl/maps/JzKdafAY8T22>) to hear horror stories from the building's tenants, who are suing indicted slumlord (<http://patch.com/new-york/east-village/infamous-east-village-slumlord-steve-croman-due-back-court-tuesday>) Steve Croman.

Among their haunting tales from within the brick walls of 159 Stanton:

Rampant mold. Rats scurrying across their floors. Collapsing and leaking ceilings. Wall cracks so wide residents can spy on each other. Surprise visits from a private investigator. A man who wandered in from the street and defecated in an empty apartment.

**UPDATE:** A spokesperson from Croman's company, 9300 Realty, sent a statement to Patch saying "9300 has been very responsive to the Cooper Square Committee and the tenants at 159 Stanton Street."

Scroll down to read his full statement.

159 Stanton St.



Croman is already facing 20 felony charges filed by State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman for other crimes. He's accused of receiving \$45 million in refinancing loans over three years by inflating incomes on mortgage documents, and — in a separate civil suit filed by Schneiderman — harassing rent-controlled tenants at his other NYC buildings out of their apartments. If he's charged, he faces up to 25 years in prison. (You can read Bloomberg's extensive, damning report on Croman [here \(https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-12/get-out\)](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-12/get-out).)

In the meantime, Croman remains in control of 159 Stanton — and the lives of those within.



The building's rent-stabilized tenants are accusing Croman of using "construction-as-harassment" to drive them out, so he can then renovate their apartments and bring in high-income renters.

Recently, a burglar entered a window left open in an apartment under construction. The burglar then fell through the unfinished floor into the apartment below, owned by Francis di Donato, and robbed it. At least three tenants have been burgled since Croman took over.





"It used to be a vibrant, lovely Lower East Side apartment," di Donato said. "I feel like I'm being pushed out by having my conditions so poor that I can't live here anymore."

Di Donato moved into the building 25 years ago. He now has a 12-year-old son who lives with him.

"It's really not a nice place to raise a child anymore," di Donato said. "Frankly, it's a little embarrassing to have people come visit and see the quality of life that I'm subjecting my child to now."

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Di Donato recalled that while the building was under construction, there was a leak in his ceiling from the apartment above him. The liquid inundated his cupboard, forcing him to throw all of his food out, he said. Cracks started to form in his apartment, di Donato said — cracks that grew so large he could see through them into the apartment next door.

At some point, the construction mysteriously stopped, tenants said. Now, half of the 21 units at 159 Stanton St. remain vacant — sitting gutted and unsecured. Tenants even found feces in the bathtub of an unsecured apartment, resident Weiben Wang said.



After a heavy rain hit the city on Nov. 29 and Nov. 30, water leaked in through the building's broken roof, tenants said, and flooded the stairwell between the fourth and fifth floor of the building. Large chunks of plaster fell from the ceiling and stayed on the floor for a week without anyone coming to deal with the damage, they said.

"When it rains outside, it rains inside," Wang said.

Since Croman bought the building, the private investigator working for him, Anthony Falconite, has repeatedly visited various apartments within the building unannounced, tenants said. Their interactions with Falconite left them feeling harassed and unsafe, they said.

"I was visited by complete strangers who were really menacing and wanted to come into my apartment and look around," di Donato said. "That happened on two occasions."

The building's tenants have seen mold and rat infestations; halls strewn in dust and debris; and windows and doors left wide open for weeks.

The Cooper Square Committee, a local nonprofit that works with Lower East Side residents to help "preserve and develop affordable and environmentally healthy housing," is helping advocate for the worn-down tenants of 159 Stanton St.

"At 159 Stanton Street in particular, the construction work being done has all the telltale traits of construction-as-harassment," Joanne Zhao, an organizer for the nonprofit, said Thursday. "It has compromised the tenants."

Attorney Sherief Gaber for Urban Justice Center filed the lawsuit against Croman.

"We're hoping to... show Croman and others like him that people won't be silent, and that people will stand up to harassment, intimation, and defend their rights as tenants in the city," Gaber said.

**UPDATE:** After Patch ran this story, Croman's people from 9300 Realty sent Patch the following statement:

"9300 has been very responsive to the Cooper Square Committee and the tenants at 159 Stanton Street. The communication is well documented and our good faith efforts are very transparent. We have reached out to the tenants of 159 Stanton and the Cooper Square Committee on multiple occasions offering to immediately address any open issues at the building and in tenants' apartments. Management has not been informed of any open repair items in tenant apartments, however we remain willing to immediately address any such issues as they are brought to our attention. Additionally, past repair issues have been addressed promptly.

We have copied city officials on our past correspondence with these tenants (and the Cooper Square Committee) as our good faith efforts are well documented."

*Photos by Cameron Luttrell/Patch*

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