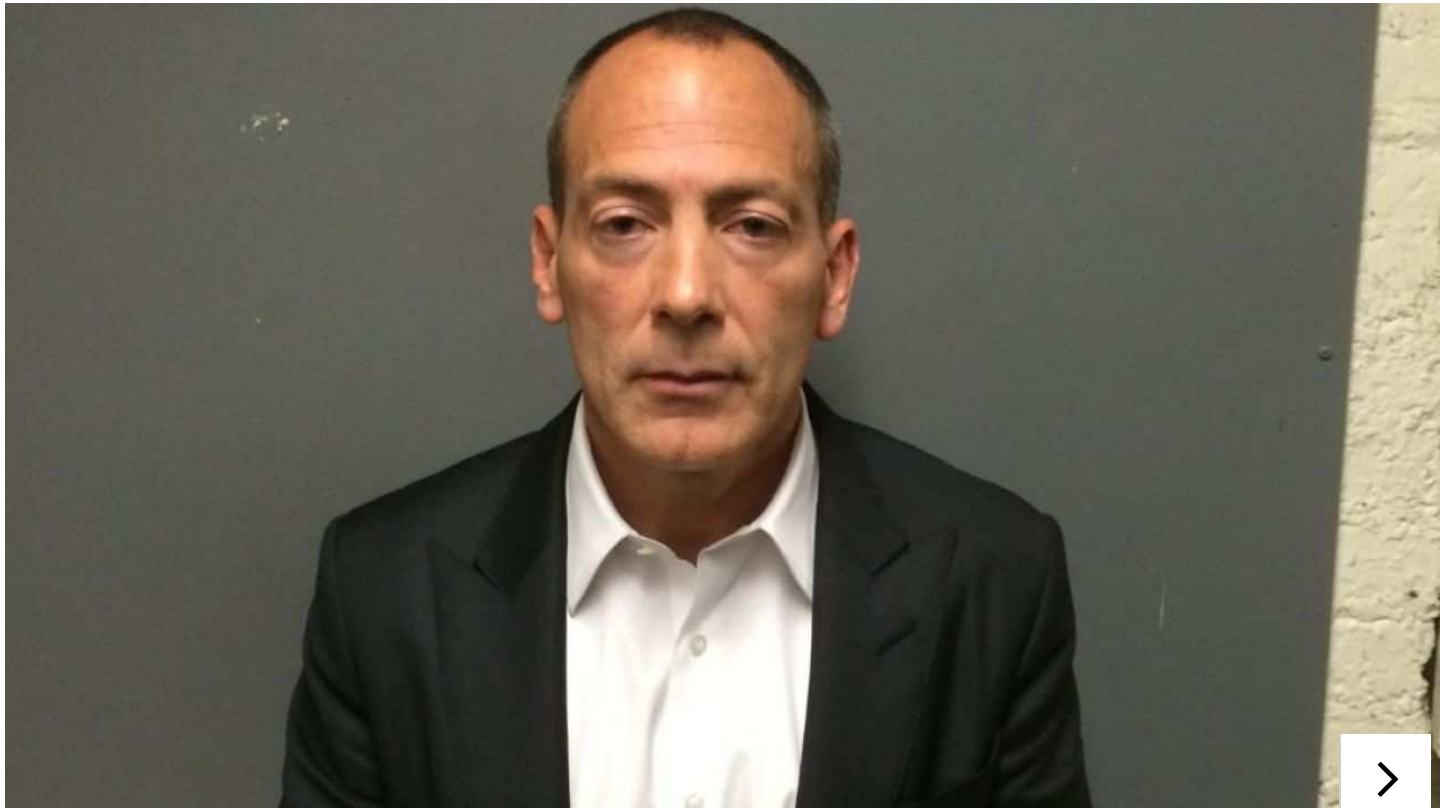


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Steven Croman, 49, is accused of forcing rent-regulated tenants out of his New York City buildings to convert their apartments to more profitable market-rate units. Croman has been indicted on 20 felony counts, according to the office of New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman. (Credit: Office of the Attorney General)



REAL ESTATE

NYC landlord Steven Croman accused of forcing out rent-stabilized tenants to convert apartments

By Alison Fox alison.fox@amny.com May 9, 2016

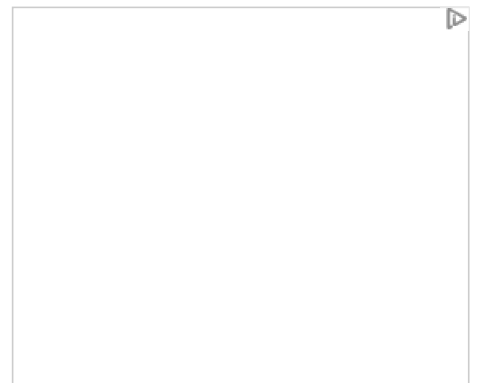
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COMMENTS

A Manhattan landlord with more than 140 apartment buildings to his name was charged on Monday with harassing rent-stabilized tenants and for illegal construction, exposing them to lead-contaminated dust, state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman said.

Schneiderman said Steven Croman, along with a former city police officer and his mortgage broker, ran a scheme in which they would buy cheap buildings with rent-stabilized apartments throughout Manhattan and apply for a loan.

They would then reapply for the loan, falsely stating that the rent-stabilized tenants were gone, Schneiderman said, and then harass the tenants to leave.

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"The scope of this enterprise was really unlike any other we've seen," he said. "This guy, essentially, was the Bernie Madoff of landlords."

Croman, who was indicted on 20 felony charges and was also implicated in a civil case, was also accused of performing illegal construction on several of the buildings, resulting in lead dust that was up to 65 times above the legal limit.

"These were construction zones that looked like something out of a poorly funded project in the developing world," Schneiderman said. "The scheme was comprehensive: it went from the crudest levels of harassment and endangering of tenants lives, up to very sophisticated schemes to defraud banks."

Croman was released on a \$1 million bond on Monday. His attorney, Benjamin Brafman, said he pleaded not guilty and "intends to address all issues in a responsible fashion."

Robin Tzannes, 65, moved into her rent-stabilized East Village apartment 41 years ago. Since Croman bought the building nine years ago, Tzannes said, she has gone to court three times to defend herself against what she calls "ridiculous" charges, including claims she hadn't paid her rent.

"It was pretty horrible when you come home and you find an eviction notice on your door and you haven't done anything wrong," she said, adding she has spent more than \$30,000 in court fees.

"He started the harassment immediately," Tzannes added. "It's been a nightmare."

Similarly, about a month after Croman purchased Silvana Jakich's building on the Lower East Side, she said the intimidation started. Croman is accused of employing a former police officer to threaten the tenants and pressure them into moving out.

"It's an endless process and he's got people on the payroll that are just there to get rid of you," said Jakich. "They're really good at what they do and they're very fast talking and it catches you unaware. It's just a frightening experience."

Jakich said that out of 10 apartments in the building, Croman has succeeded in getting rid of five rent-stabilized tenants.

Croman's next court appearance is scheduled for June 21.



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