

Most Housing Rent Rises Blocked by Nixon Order

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By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

The 90-day wage-price freeze applies to housing rents even if landlords and tenants agreed on an increase before Aug 15, the Office of Emergency Preparedness said yesterday.

The clarification, which appeared to resolve one of the many troubling questions surrounding the freeze, came from Arnold Gordon, counsel at the local office, who said he had obtained it from Washington.

Telephone calls on this issue and other questions poured into the preparedness office at 26 Federal Plaza yesterday at the rate of 4,000 an hour—or 200 an hour on each of the 20 phones, according to officials there.

The freeze also means that in

Emergency Office Still Not Prepared Despite Move Here

By JOHN DARNTON

The Office of Emergency Preparedness moved into a new office here yesterday, but was still not quite prepared to cope with the unending rush of telephone queries about the wage-and-price freeze.

From a hasty furnished suite on the 13th floor of the Federal Office Building on Foley Square, 17 employes from other Federal agencies answered questions on 20 lines. In the morning hours, according to Norman Steinlauf, a public information officer, the calls were coming in at the rate of 4,000 an hour.

"It's a constant ringing. It hasn't let up for a single second," he remarked, against a din of telephones.

Many of the questions went unanswered as the workers had little to go on except for sample questions and answers and their own common sense.

"Oy gevalt," remarked Joseph Novak, who is ordinarily a compliance officer with the wage and hour division of the United States Department of Labor, as he lifted up the receiver for at least the 300th time. He listened patiently. "Is he allowed to get the raise?" he said finally, "the answer is yes."

He picked up another phone. Can the price of steak be raised? "No," he answered. "But apples can. They're a raw agricultural product."

almost all cases tenants who move into new quarters during the three-month period will not have to pay higher rents than their predecessors paid, Mr. Gordon said.

This strict application of the Presidential order temporarily negates the effect of the states vacancy control law, which lifted rent control on urban apartments as they are vacated as of July 1.

There is at least one limited exception, however, according to the official. If a landlord installs an additional item such as an air conditioner, or dishwasher that was not there before, he would be entitled to a modest increase covering only the cost of the appliance itself. Replacement of an old refrigerator with a newer model, he said, would not qualify under this rule.

Other possible exceptions in the rent freeze have not yet been decided, Mr. Gordon said. Among the "possibilities," he said, was allowing landlords in some cases to raise rents to bring them into line with widespread increases imposed before the freeze.

The counsel denied a report in a news release of the Builders Association of Northern New Jersey asserting that Philip Drury, head of the local preparedness office, had told association officials earlier in the day that rents could be raised in such cases.

"That was only one possible interpretation," Mr. Gordon said.

There would be room for further exceptions to the rent freeze, through individual appeals by landlords in dire hardship, Mr. Gordon said.

The question whether landlords might retroactively charge tenants rent increases agreed to before the freeze, but banned until after Nov. 12, is still to be determined, he said.

However, he said that even if a tenant had agreed to a rent increase, the freeze preempted it until the controls ended.

Distressed by the temporary halt on vacancy decontrol, landlord associations in the city appealed to the President in statements not to "jeopardize tens of thousands of apartments facing abandonment," as a spokesman for the Metropolitan Fair Rent Committee put it.

Tenant groups on the other hand applauded the step and urged that the rent controls be made even more sweeping and permanent.