

Element residents can return, says fire marshal



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Tenants can return to the Element, at 808 N Franklin St., after a broken water line flooded the building July 16.

Some expressed trepidation about moving back into the Tampa high-rise after flooding forced an evacuation.

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Residents of the Element apartment tower have been cleared to move back in 10 days after a broken water line flooded the building, Tampa Fire Rescue said Monday afternoon.

"As of now, all Element residents are welcome home," building managers announced to tenants in an email following the Fire Marshal's assessment.

Building managers have put residents up in hotels since the July 16 flooding. Monday, many of them stood outside the building with bags, waiting to hear if they could return.

With 395 units and 27 stories, the Element at 808 N Franklin St. is home to some 500 people.

The Tampa Fire Marshal's Office

investigated and determined it was safe to reopen, said John Bogush, a Tampa Fire Rescue captain.

"There have been a lot of eyes on this process," Bogush said. Some repairs are still underway as residents move back in, but those repairs don't have any bearing on the safety of the building, Bogush added.

Residents "will notice the smell of fresh paint and repairs, some major, taking place," Element staff told tenants in an email. "We ask for your understanding as that work is completed."

After moving her belongings back in Monday afternoon, Ashleigh Ramirez, 28, headed to Walmart to buy cleaning supplies. Her apartment and the hallway outside smelled "awful," like sewage, she said.

The smell was there when Ramirez first moved into the Element in May, but she was able to mask it with room fresheners, she said. Now, it's much worse.

Ramirez would like to move out, but with rents rising across the city, her options are limited, she said.

After living in hotel rooms since the evacuation, Tracy Story, 37, opted to stay another night Monday before moving back into her apartment. Nearly everything inside was destroyed, she said — furniture, televisions, laptops.

Her renter's insurance will cover the damage, she said. But she wanted to see the place to determine whether she'd be comfortable there, "before we started buying all this brand new furniture."

Story said she hopes the Element will allow her to break her lease and move.

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