THE APARTMENT INDUSTRY often overlooks the maintenance side of the business when it comes to fair housing education, focusing instead on the leasing and front-office folks. At least that is my theory.

But liability cannot be delegated! It’s about accountability, and if maintenance professionals make a fair housing mistake, then they, apartment owners and their supervisors can be held accountable.

Maintenance technicians can be held accountable even if their managers told them what they were doing was OK, or if they did not understand that there was a fair housing issue to begin with.

Supervisors can be held accountable if they supervise that errant maintenance professional in any way—either directly as a maintenance supervisor or indirectly as a Regional VP. Owners and Principals, too, can be held accountable because the maintenance employee is their “agent.”

And with accountability comes a price tag—and the cost isn’t cheap. It is not unusual for today’s fair housing cases to result in settlements or judgments in the tens or hundreds of thousands of (often uninsured) dollars—if not millions.

In a perfect world, all apartment industry professionals would care about maintenance and fair housing because compliance is simply the right thing to do. But if that rationale does not resonate, then understand that maintenance violations in fair housing can cost a lot of money.

Editor’s note: This is the first of four Maintenance Insider columns that will focus on fair housing issues. Next month: Fair and legal ways to prioritize work orders.

Nadeen Green is Senior Counsel with For Rent Media Solutions. The information contained in this article, which originally ran as a blog on multifamilyinsiders.com, is not to be considered legal advice, and the author and FRMS strongly suggest that you consult with your own counsel as to any fair housing questions or problems you may have.

To all the NAA members who advocated for The Apartment Industry during Congress’s August recess!