

Riverside County issues 45-day ban on new short-term rentals in Idyllwild, wine country



Tom Coulter

Palm Springs Desert Sun | *Published September 13, 2022*

A temporary ban on new short-term rentals in Idyllwild and Temecula's wine country will be in effect until at least late October following a vote by Riverside County supervisors in response to resident complaints.

The county's board of supervisors approved a 45-day moratorium on new short-term rentals in Idyllwild, Pine Cove and Mountain Center, as well as in the unincorporated Temecula Valley wine country, by a unanimous vote during its meeting Tuesday.

The supervisors also discussed a suite of new rules for short-term rentals across all unincorporated parts of the county during their meeting Tuesday, following several hours of testimony from rental owners and neighbors in surrounding communities.

More: [New short-term rentals may be banned temporarily in Idyllwild, wine country](#)

More: [Riverside County weighs new short-term rental rules, enforcement steps to address growing market](#)

The revised rules for short-term rentals in unincorporated Riverside County include new occupancy limits, stiffer penalties for violations, signage requirements and the possibility of permit revocation after three violations.

The 45-day ban on new rentals in the Idyllwild and wine country areas, meanwhile, will take effect immediately and is slated to last until at least Oct. 28.

The moratorium and new rules were crafted as the number of permitted short-term rentals in unincorporated Riverside County has roughly quadrupled since 2016, the year the county adopted its short-term rental ordinance. County officials have estimated double to triple that number are operating without proper permits.

The county's new policies also arrived after a 2021 grand jury report on the short-term rental landscape found issues with the county's current enforcement process, saying fines are too small to act as a significant deterrent.

The areas covered by the 45-day moratorium have roughly 62% of the 1,131 short-term rentals in unincorporated Riverside County as of early August.

Short-term rental permits have also been issued at an accelerated rate over the past year, according to county data. In the three years before the release of the grand jury report in June 2021, the average number of short-term rental certificates issued monthly was eight; between June 2021 and July 2022, the average was 54.

The recent increase in applications "demonstrates a rush to obtain permits that may be inconsistent with proposed or future licensing regulations," according to the draft moratorium ordinance.

In a memo recommending supervisors adopt the moratorium, county planners wrote: "If the increase continues, adverse impacts that have the potential to endanger the health and safety of residents, guests and the very environment and resources that attract visitors to the County will increase.

"Adverse impacts to surrounding neighbors and properties include unpermitted large-scale events, overconcentration that destabilizes the neighborhood quality of life, excessive noise, disorderly conduct, traffic congestion, illegal vehicle parking, accumulation of refuse and loss of potential housing stock for long-term rentals and permanent residents."

Supervisor Chuck Washington, whose current district includes both the Idyllwild mountain area and the Temecula wine country, said the moratorium will allow county staff to get a better understanding of the current rental landscape in those areas.

"The reason for the moratorium is to give staff the time to catch its breath and take an assessment of what's out there," Washington said Tuesday. "We know that there are a lot of STRs that are being utilized that are not registered, but they don't know how many. I think in this 45-day window, they'll have an opportunity to gather that information and report back to the board."

While the board did not consider approval of any caps on the max number of short-term rentals allowed in a given area, Washington indicated a limit could be warranted in the future.

"If they find out that the community has been unfairly inundated, and let me just drop some wild numbers," Washington said. "Would we say it's okay that two out of every

three houses in wine country becomes an STR? We'd say no, that's ridiculous ... So somewhere between where we are and that point is an appropriate number.”

Several Idyllwild residents pushed for the emergency moratorium during the hearing Tuesday, as well as in past meetings, arguing the area has become oversaturated with rentals. A couple others, including the leader of a group of vacation rental owners, pushed back against the proposal and worried it could be extended indefinitely.

With the adopted moratorium, Riverside County joins a growing list of cities and counties in southern California that have responded to the growing rental market. In June, supervisors in San Bernardino County approved a similar pause on new rentals in Airbnb hotspot Joshua Tree and other communities, while many cities in the Coachella Valley have taken steps to address the growing market.

Supervisors OK new limits on occupancy

The supervisors also adopted a few revisions to the lengthy list of new rules for short-term rentals operating across all of unincorporated Riverside County, which have been crafted over the course of several lengthyhearings.

The board heard from dozens of residents during the day-long meeting Tuesday, with people on both sides of the issue also urging the board to address unpermitted rentals.

Jeannine Charles-Stigall, a 15-year resident of Idyllwild, told the board she has a “monster” vacation house next door that often exceeds its occupancy limits, adding she’s been unable to find the rental on online listings.

“It is not the only one. There are several,” Charles-Stigall said. “We are losing our neighborhoods.”

In recent meetings, county officials have noted several steps made by the county, including entering into an agreement with a compliance technology company to handle short-term rental applications and tax collections and hiring more code enforcement officials to work over the weekends, to address those issues.

More: Riverside County hires firm to monitor short-term rentals in unincorporated areas

But others argued Tuesday that the county is going too far with its proposed rules, placing additional burdens on rental owners who never draw complaints without doing enough to address the so-called “bad actors.”

“You’re overcooking this,” Tom DeCarlo, a member of a vacation rental owners’ group, told the board. “(With) a lot of the other good things that are in the provision, you've

got the issue solved. You probably solve more than 95% of it, without ever touching occupancy.”

The draft ordinance Tuesday initially included a 10-person occupancy limit for all properties, with an option to increase the maximum to 16 people if the rental owners complies with a list of added requirements from the county.

DeCarlo and others criticized the 10-person limit as too small for rental owners of large estates, while some argued the limit was too high for smaller rentals that may not have the space to safely host 10 guests.

Ultimately, the board agreed with a proposal from Jessica Hinton, who owns a rental company in Temecula and encouraged the county to consider occupancy limits tied to the size of a property.

The draft ordinance advanced by supervisors Tuesday includes the following occupancy limits:

- A maximum of 10 people, with one person allowed for every 200 square feet of the rental, on properties that cover less than an acre.
- A maximum of 16 people, with one person allowed for every 200 square feet of the rental, on properties between 1 and 2.5 acres.
- A maximum of 20 people, with one person allowed for every 200 square feet of the rental, on properties over 2.5 acres.

The supervisors will likely discuss the issue more in coming weeks. John Hildebrand, the county’s planning director, said county staff will return to the board Oct. 18 to discuss the steps being taken to address the issues that led to the emergency moratorium.

Tom Coulter covers the cities of Palm Desert, La Quinta, Rancho Mirage and Indian Wells. Reach him at thomas.coulter@desertsun.com or on Twitter @tomcoulter_.