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Relocation and Moving guide

When the time comes for you to move - where do you begin? You may be moving for a career change, divorce, death in the family, retirement, financial reasons. Perhaps you are responsible for moving a disabled family member. What ever the reason, a guide to moving should help you prepare.

Be organized - think about what you have. Do you *have* to take it all? Either have a garage sale or donate it to a local charity - don't assume that no one would want your *junk*. Treasures to others.

Do a pre-move-in inspection. You can't be charged for "normal wear and tear" under most state and local laws. Do a move-in inspection and take note of broken, burned, chipped or otherwise blemished items in the apartment. Make sure the shower, toilet and faucets work. See and use our free Moving Checklist to note damages to your unit.

Document in Writing. Document, in writing and pictures, anything that is less than perfect and attach a copy, signed and dated by you and the landlord, as an addendum to the lease. This will be used again when you move out.

Get a receipt or keep the canceled check. Simple enough, but a number of people fail to keep the canceled security deposit check. Without documented proof, the landlord may simply say he never got one.

Leave the apartment in the condition you rented it. Leases require the tenant to return the apartment to its original color or condition. Most landlords prefer painted walls with neutral colors, such as off-white or beige, as opposed to wallpaper. Before you decide to decorate, get approval, in writing, from the landlord.

If the apartment/home changes owners during your lease: You should contact the new owners and do a walk through or simply send them a copy of your original move-in inspection – certified mail. This may help avoid conflicts when you move out. Your security deposit should be transferred to the new owners.

MOVE IN or MOVE OUT WALK THROUGH: If the owner's neighbor, friend, daughter, etc conducts the inspection, make a note of it. Why? Sometimes they are doing someone a favor, such as an absentee landlord, and are not aware of what to look for and may not be the same person who conducts the move-out inspection. Take pictures and checklist. Very Important!!!

Clean things responsibly. A thorough vacuuming, sweeping of the floors, washing of the walls and wiping down of counters and cupboards will suffice. There's really no need, for example, to steam clean carpets (unless it's to remove pet stains or smells). In short, leave the apartment in the kind of condition you'd feel comfortable moving into.

Don't leave stuff behind. Many tenants leave unwanted items such as trash, old furniture or clothing. If there's a charge to store the items or dispose of them, it can be deducted from your security deposit. If the charges exceed the deposit, the landlord can sue for the additional money.

Get a witness. After you've cleaned, have someone take a walk-through to witness that you left the apartment in reasonably good shape. It's best that the witness be someone who'd be willing to testify for you in court. Take pictures. Did you take them when you moved in?

Time with landlord. After your walk-through with a witness, ask the landlord to do a walk-through so that you can show that the apartment is in good condition. It is then time turn in the keys and provide your new address.

Provide a forwarding address. Tenants don't get an expedient return of their security deposit because of a simple mistake: They forget to provide the landlord with a forwarding address. Give the landlord a self-addressed stamped envelope with your new address on it.

Know your interest-rate rights. You probably qualify to receive interest on your security deposit although there are exceptions for some cities and states.

Follow up--in writing. The letter should highlight that you paid a full deposit, left the apartment in good condition at the end of the lease term and should also include your forwarding address.

The letter should also state that the landlord is in violation of the law for not returning the deposit (unless you were previously notified), and should state that you should receive interest.

In most states, you can **sue to recover twice the amount of your deposit**, plus interest for each year the deposit was held, court costs and lawyer fees.