

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Reduce your moving stress, read up on your tenant rights

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MADISON - August is a time of significant migration into and out of rental properties throughout the state, especially in college towns. For some renters, this year's new lease may be the first legal contract they have ever signed. Others may be leaving their first rental and have concerns about their security deposits.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) would like to shed some light on this often-complicated matter by helping renters understand their rights and responsibilities when entering or leaving a rental agreement.

"There are a number of financial risks and legal requirements to consider for those heading into or leaving rental properties - especially with regard to their security deposits," said Lara Sutherlin, Administrator for the Division of Trade and Consumer Protection. "To receive as much of the security deposit as possible at the end of a lease, a renter should take the time to get educated about their responsibilities in the transaction and the steps they need to take when moving into or out of a rental."

The simplest way to start learning about your rights as a tenant is to download a free copy of DATCP's "[Tenants' Rights and Responsibilities](#)" fact sheet. This document addresses a wide range of rental-related topics including security deposits, rent increases, evictions, property maintenance, and more. For even more information, DATCP's "[Guide for Landlords and Tenants](#)" digs deeper into these topics and is a valuable resource for both property owners and renters alike.

DATCP receives more than 1,000 landlord/tenant complaints each year, with most involving issues related to security deposits. So whether you are moving into or out of a rental property, consider the following tips to protect your deposit:

Move-in tips:

- Complete a check-in sheet when you get the keys. If your lease requires a security deposit, you have seven days from the first rental date to complete a check-in report that notes pre-existing conditions. If you fail to return a check-in sheet within seven days, you may be giving up your right to contest some security deposit withholdings for pre-existing conditions. Take photos (or videos) of any damages, submit copies of the photos to your landlord with the report, and keep a copy of all of these materials for yourself.
- At the start of a tenancy, the landlord must provide you with the name and address of a person who can be readily contacted regarding maintenance problems. But unless otherwise agreed, tenants are usually responsible for routine minor repairs and are required to comply with any maintenance and sanitation requirements imposed on tenants by local housing codes.

Move-out tips:

- Ask your landlord for a preliminary walkthrough before your final checkout. This will give you a chance to assess what needs special attention for cleaning or repairs in order to avoid potential security deposit deductions.
- Be sure to provide your new address in order to receive your security deposit and any accounting statement for any withholdings promptly.
- Take detailed photos of the property during your final walkthrough in order to document the condition in which you left it.

If you have issues regarding your security deposit or questions about your rights as a tenant, contact the Consumer Protection Hotline at 800-422-7128 or via email: datcpHotline@wi.gov. You can also find resource materials and file a complaint online at datcp.wi.gov. Finally, look for rental assistance organizations in your area and find out if they offer walk-in services to discuss any issues you may face.

For additional consumer protection information, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wi.gov or find us at www.facebook.com/wiconsumer or on Twitter: [@wiconsumer](https://twitter.com/wiconsumer).