



Student or Not, You Have Rights as a Tenant

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Media Contact: Jerad Albracht, 608-224-5007
Bill Cosh, Communications Director, 608-224-5020

MADISON – Moving into or out of a rental property can be a complicated process, and knowing that there is a security deposit on the line can make matters more stressful. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) offers a number of tips to help renters understand their rights and responsibilities when entering or leaving a rental agreement.

"Renting is a new responsibility for many college-aged consumers and it is important to understand that a lease agreement is a contract," said Michelle Reinen, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection. "Renters should pay close attention to the lease requirements and ensure they are fulfilling their responsibilities under the agreement in order to get the most money returned from their deposit."

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.

DATCP receives more than 1,000 landlord/tenant complaints each year, with most consumer grievances involving 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 promptly. (If you are moving out at the end of your lease, the landlord must return your security deposit, less any amounts that may be withheld, within 21 days after you move out.)
- 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: datcp hotline@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).