

Renter information— rental location, selection and roommates

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Quick Facts

A rental location agency is regulated by law and must be licensed by the Colorado Real Estate Commission.

A person considering rental property should check the reputation of the prospective landlord, examine the liveability of the rental housing with respect to certain standards—such as environment, health and safety, services, utilities, etc—and inspect the rental unit thoroughly.

The Colorado Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination of any kind in the transfer, sale, rental or leasing of most rental property.

Selection of a roommate should be done with regard to certain legal, financial and personal implications that may affect the living group later.

- a nonexistent address;
- property which is not for lease;
- property which does not meet the client's specifications;
- property which rents for a different price than that quoted by the rental location agent;
- property which already has been rented;
- property listed without the consent of the landlord.

When considering the use of a rental location agent, a person should consider the following:

—All available sources of free listings should be used first.

—A person should be very specific about the type of place desired. If there is a contract provided for this purpose, desired extras—such as a fenced yard, garage or driveway, close proximity to campus or another specified area, or other things—should be listed.

—The rental service should be used to its maximum effectiveness. A person should find out how many calls a day are permitted or if a daily visit to the office to copy listings is expected.

—A person should keep a copy of each listing given by the agent.

—Some agencies have a policy of allowing more than one party to share a contract and split the fee (if they are looking for the same type of place). An inquiry about this possibility should be made and taken advantage of if it is available.

—If problems or questions develop, a person can contact the Colorado Real Estate Commission Enforcement Division, 110 State Service Building, 1525 Sherman St., Denver, Colo. 80203 (telephone: 303/892-2633). Complaints must be submitted in writing.

Rental Location

As soon as a person knows rental housing will be needed, the search should begin. The earlier a person starts looking, the more likely is the prospect of finding satisfactory arrangements.

Local sources of information for available rentals include newspapers, realtors, the housing office of nearby colleges and universities and bulletin boards in public locations (i.e., supermarkets, laundromats). A person should check all local sources of information.

A rental location agency also may be useful in locating an apartment or house.

Rental Location Agencies

A rental location agency is regulated by law. The following guidelines have been established to protect clients of such agencies:

—The agency must be licensed by the Colorado Real Estate Commission.

—If the agency does not have listings to fit the client's specifications after two weeks of consistent effort, all but \$10 of the fee is to be refunded.

—It is unlawful to knowingly refer a client to

Selection of Rental Property

There are several considerations in the selection of desirable rental property:

—*Reputation and practices of prospective landlord.* The best way to check this is to question the present tenants. A visit to the rental unit of interest to find out how satisfied the residents are with the landlord, especially regarding repairs, rent

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increases and general promises made by the landlord or manager, is a wise idea.

—*Liveability of rental housing.* Factors to be considered in the selection of rental housing will differ from person to person and family to family. The following list will give some ideas to consider:

Environment—traffic, parking space for tenants and visitors, temporary parking for service and delivery vehicles, noise, smoke, dust, odors, adjacent dwellings, general neighborhood, access to public transportation, access to shopping areas.

Health and safety—crime rates (check with local police), pets (allowability or restrictions on pets in building and neighborhood), fire exits and routes present and clearly marked, lighting on streets and walks, police protection, building security, railings on stairways, locks on doors, locks on windows.

Services—maintenance and repair, garbage and trash collection, care of public areas and exterior of building.

Recreation—play areas for children, space for social gatherings and hobbies.

Design characteristics—outside appearance, view from windows, interior space, privacy, storage, laundry facilities, wall and floor coverings, room arrangement, size of rooms, sound insulation, lighting, efficiency and convenience of kitchen and dining areas, appliances, work areas, adequate storage.

Utilities—heating and cooling systems, telephone and television installation available, convenient light switches, ventilation to exterior in bath and kitchen, low plumbing noise level.

—*Inspection of rental unit.* A person should inspect the inside and outside of the premises thoroughly before renting the unit. If there are repairs needed, arrangements should be made in writing with the landlord for these to be done by a stated date. A damage inventory should be made before moving in. (For more information on moving in, see Service in Action sheet 9.903.)

Discrimination

The Colorado Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, national origin, ancestry, marital status or religion. This prohibition concerns the transfer, sale, rental or leasing of all premises except the following:

Nonprofit, fraternal, educational or social organizations and clubs; and rooms offered for rent or lease in a single family dwelling maintained and occupied in part by the owner or lessee as his or her household.

If renters feel that they have been the victim of discrimination as prohibited in the Fair Housing Act, they should contact the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, 312 State Services Building, 1525 Sherman St., Denver, Colo. 80203 (telephone: 303/892-2621).

Many cities also have laws prohibiting housing discrimination. To find out about a prospective

community, a person should check with local city officials.

Choosing Roommates

The selection of a roommate should not be treated lightly. There are legal, financial and personal implications affecting members of a living group for which many persons do not seem to be aware.

The following issues have been known to cause conflict between household members and should be discussed thoroughly before housing arrangements are finalized:

—Standards of cleanliness, especially when pets are involved; responsibility for housekeeping chores, cooking, shopping, etc.

—Study habits, noise levels, enjoyment of music, partying and entertainment.

—Late hours, general attitudes and values concerning liquor, drugs, overnight guests, guests at odd hours.

—The personality, age and backgrounds of prospective roommates.

—Budgeting: Who is responsible for coordinating payment of rent, utilities, groceries and other expenses being shared by all members of the household? (Paying by check can alleviate some misunderstanding on these matters.)

—Spending habits: How much can a person afford to pay for rent, utilities, phones, etc.? What standard of living is each individual group member accustomed to?

—Borrowing articles of clothing, food, personal effects, books, bicycles, cars, etc.

—Whether there are children in the household.

—Television habits, hours and programs.

—Level of heating and air conditioning: Will temperatures be comfortable and agreeable?

—Working hours: Will shifts and times be compatible?

—Eating habits, special diets, cooking habits.

—Length of lease and commitment to living unit.

Another aspect roommates should be familiar with is that of **joint and several liability**. Most individuals assume that, when everyone signs a common lease or contract, each individual is responsible for a share of the rent. If all sign separate contracts, this is true; however, the majority of contracts or leases is handled in a way in which all parties on the contract are responsible for the performance of their roommates; i.e., the entire rent.

If one roommate moves out without paying his or her share of the rent, the remaining tenants must come up with that share and assume responsibility for damages. Roommates have recourse by either holding the security deposit from persons moving out or taking them to court, providing they have signed the contract. This situation is where many friendships stop and feuds begin.

(For more information on renting, see Service in Action sheets 9.903, 9.904, 9.905.)