



HOUSING

Renting: Location, Selection and Roommates no. 9.906

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Quick Facts...

Before renting, check the reputation of the prospective landlord, examine the livability of the rental housing (environment, health and safety, services, utilities), and inspect the rental unit thoroughly.

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

When selecting a roommate, consider legal, financial and personal factors that may affect all members of the household.



Putting Knowledge to Work

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Location

As soon as you know you need rental housing, begin your search. The earlier you start looking, the more likely you will find satisfactory arrangements.

Local sources of information include newspapers, realtors, the housing office of nearby colleges and universities, and bulletin boards in public locations (e.g., super-markets, laundromats). A rental location agency also may be useful.

Selection

There are several considerations in choosing rental property. Question the present tenants about the landlord. Visit the exact unit you will be renting to find out how satisfied they are, especially regarding repairs, rent increases and general promises made by the landlord or manager.

Factors to be considered in the selection of rental housing differ from person to person and family to family. The following are some ideas to consider:

- **Environment:** traffic, parking 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 (restrictions on pets in building and neighborhood), fire exits and routes present and clearly marked, lighting on streets and walks, police protection, building security, railing on stairways, locks on doors, locks on windows, conformity with fire codes, carbon monoxide.
- **Services:** maintenance and repair, garbage and trash collection, care of public areas and building exterior.
- **Recreation:** play areas for children, space for social gatherings and hobbies, rules for parties, proximity to neighbors for noise.
- **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, adequate number of electrical outlets, exposed wiring, leaky plumbing.

Inspect the inside and outside of the premises thoroughly before renting. If repairs are needed, make arrangements in writing with the landlord for these to be done by a stated date. Include in the lease a deduction in rent owed for each month the repairs are not finished according to industry-wide standards. Make a damage inventory before moving in.

The Colorado Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, national origin, ancestry, marital status, family status, religion or physical handicap. This prohibition concerns the transfer, sale, rental or leasing of all premises except the following: nonprofit, fraternal, educational or social organizations/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 you feel you have been the victim of discrimination as prohibited in the Fair Housing Act, contact the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, 1525 Sherman St., 6th Floor, Denver, Colorado 80203; (303) 866-2621.

For more information on renting, see fact sheets 9.903, Renting: Security Deposits; 9.904, Renting: Leases; and 9.905, Renting: Evictions and Landlord Liens.

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Discrimination

Federal and State law prohibits housing discrimination. Check with local city officials.

Landlords cannot discriminate in ways prohibited by law. That is, they cannot discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, national origin, ancestry, family status, marital status or religion. Landlords can discriminate in ways that are not prohibited by law. For example, landlords can refuse to rent to students or people with pets.

Often, it is difficult to determine whether or not discrimination is prohibited by law. In this instance, contact the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, local civil rights office, legal aid office or a private attorney.

Roommates

Select a roommate with regard to legal, financial and personal factors that may affect all members in the home. The following issues can cause conflict between roommates. Discuss each one thoroughly before finalizing housing arrangements.

- Standards of cleanliness, especially when pets are involved; responsibility for housekeeping chores, cooking, shopping, etc.
- Study habits, noise and music level, partying and entertainment.
- Late hours, general attitudes and values concerning liquor, drugs, overnight guests, guests at odd hours, boyfriends/girlfriends.
- The personality, age and backgrounds of prospective roommates.
- Budgeting: Who will coordinate payment of rent, utilities, groceries and other expenses shared by all members of the household? (Payment 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 person accustomed to?
- Borrowing clothing, food, personal effects, books, bicycles, cars, etc.
- Children in the household.
- Television habits, hours and programs.
- Heating and air conditioning: What temperatures are preferred?
- 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 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 each roommate signs a separate contract, this may be 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, or damages the landlord's property, the remaining tenants are responsible. Roommates can take the offender to court, providing he or she has signed the contract. Failure to pay all the rent on time, however, may result in the eviction of all the roommates, not just those who have not paid.

Visit www.sls.colostate.edu for more information on housing issues and to obtain a roommate agreement form. Furthermore, Colorado State's Off Campus Student Services (www.ocssral.colostate.edu) is an excellent housing resource.