



## Off Campus Housing Referrals

University of Massachusetts Amherst | 235 Whitmore Administration Building | 413-577-2187 | [www.housing.umass.edu](http://www.housing.umass.edu)

### Protect Your Security Deposit

#### Record the condition of the property

Most of us aren't thinking about Moving Out when we Move in to a new place, but since it's likely your landlord is holding some of your money in the form of a security deposit., it's important that you prepare for the end of your tenancy right from the beginning. **Before you start unpacking dishes and hanging prints on the walls**, take a few simple steps that will help you avoid the misunderstandings, and disagreements, and legal hassles that can occur over the return of security deposits.

#### Look At Everything

Give your unit a thorough inspection before you move in. Better yet, do it before you sign the lease! It will be easier to spot problems while the place is empty.

Check things like water pressure and sink and/or tub drainage in the kitchen and bathrooms. Check that the appliances operate properly. Do all the stove burners and the oven heat. Look at the appearance of floors and walls. Check the rugs and check the condition of the pads under the carpet.

#### Use a Move-In Checklist

Make a detailed inventory of what you find. The best way to do this is with a good checklist. The more you record about the unit when you move in, the better position you'll be in when moving out. It will allow you to show that certain problems existed before you moved into the unit.

In Massachusetts, landlords are required to give new tenants a written statement of conditions of the unit at move-in. It should include a comprehensive list of existing damage.

Ideally, you should fill out the checklist with your landlord. This can help prevent disputes or disagreements. If this isn't possible, inspect the unit with a friend or another housemate. This person can act as a witness to the condition of the unit at Move In in the event there is a dispute.

If you spot problems, describe specifically what's wrong. Rather than simply noting "damage to carpet," for example, state "cigarette burns, frayed edges in

carpet next to picture window.” The more detailed you are, the clearer it is that you’re not responsible for those damages. You and your landlord should each both sign the checklist after completing it.

Make a copy so that each of you has one. At the end of your tenancy, you’ll make another inspection noting their condition of your unit at move-out. You’ll be protected from being billed for damage that existed before you ever moved in. If items that were okay when you moved in are now damaged, your landlord may hold you responsible.

### **Make a Visual Record**

In addition to completing a checklist, you may also want to document the condition of your unit with photographs or video.

If you make a video of the premises, clearly state the date and time while you are taping, make a copy and send it to your landlord right away. Repeat this process when moving out.

If you take photos develop them immediately. Order a duplicate set of prints. Write the date on the back of each photograph and send the set to your landlord as soon as you get them back. This may prevent your landlord from asserting that the photos were taken later than they actually were. If you can, use a camera that automatically date-stamps each photo.