

Apartment & Housing Information for MSTC Students

Moving to your new apartment or house can be a very exciting time. This is also a critical time to take various precautions and begin the documentation process. There are many steps to take during move-in time.

Utilities

Hook-up Your Utilities: Generally, it is the tenants' responsibility to set-up the utilities. It is beneficial to call the utility companies at least two weeks in advance. When doing your budget, you not only have to consider your rent each month, but also utility costs on top of that. The cost of utilities may be the greatest when living alone. If you are sharing an apartment/house, you are able to share the cost of utility bills.

When living in an apartment, many landlords will pay the water, but you are usually responsible for all other utilities; gas, electric, telephone, cable, Internet, cell phone, etc. When living in a house, landlords will typically ask you to pay for all utilities, including the water.

Utility costs greatly vary. If you are living in an apartment complex versus an older home, the quality of insulation can be quite different. Houses tend to be a larger area of space to heat/cool. Factors to consider include:

- **Age of the property:** Unless the property has been renovated in the inside, the older apartments/homes may not have a lot of insulation. Windows may be old and allow for cold air to enter quite easily. Storm windows may not exist. Older units may not have central air. Window air conditioning units can be purchased, but tend to increase the electricity bill drastically.
- **Size of the property:** The larger the unit, the more expensive it is to heat and cool. If you are renting in a large house, the gas bill will probably be quite high in the winter months. Having roommates helps to share the utility costs.
- **Location of the unit:** Where you live in an apartment complex can affect the cost of your utility bills. Living in a corner unit versus a unit in between two apartments can be very different in terms of cost of heat. If you live in an apartment that has neighboring apartments on both sides, for instance, your apartment would be well insulated from the cold weather and wind, therefore minimizing your heating bill. If you live in an upper unit, your apartment will reap the benefits of the heat from the bottom unit; heat rises.

Refuse Collection

You will need to be aware of your trash and recycling pick-up days. Remember, being a good neighbor also means keeping your property clean and clear of garbage.

Renter's Insurance

It is highly recommended to have renter's insurance. Landlords typically have property insurance, but this does not cover your personal property. Make sure to have insurance to replace your belongings if they are damaged in a fire or stolen from your apartment. It tends to be cheaper to add a policy to the same company as your car insurance. You may also be added to your parent's home owner's insurance (check with their company's policy for details). If either is not an option, it is still inexpensive to purchase renters insurance.

Fill out a Move-In Checklist

Walk through the entire unit, preferably prior to moving your furniture in, and document any and all damages/problems that you see. It is to your benefit to fill out the Move-In Checklist, make a copy for your records, and provide a copy to your landlord within the first seven days of the lease term. You should also send a Notice To Repair letter to the landlord, outlining all repairs that need to be done.

Pictures

In addition to filling out the Move-In Checklist, take pictures so that you have visual documentation of any pre-existing damages (preferably prior to moving in furniture). Make sure you always keep a copy of any type of documentation for your records. Never hand over your only copy to anyone!

Rights and Responsibilities

Be knowledgeable on the property owner's rights and responsibilities of a landlord. Typical renting requirements follow:

- Once you have viewed a unit multiple times and are seriously considering renting the place, you will need to provide the landlord with certain information.
- You will be asked to fill out an application. Usually, there is a fee (typically \$30-\$75 range). The landlord may check your credit report as well.
- Most campus area landlords require a student under the age of 23 to have a co-signor (i.e., a parent or guardian).
- Once your application has been approved, you will then be asked to sign a lease. **Make sure to read the lease thoroughly before signing.** REMEMBER: Leases are negotiable documents, as long as you and the landlord agree to the terms and both sign off on the lease.
- After signing the lease, your co-signor will also be asked to sign the lease. Basically this is assurance to the landlord that if the student tenants are not able to pay the rent, that they as a co-signor will be held responsible for covering the costs.
- Once all documents have been signed, make sure to keep a copy of EVERYTHING!
- Typically, after signing the lease, the landlord will ask that you pay a security deposit (usually equivalent to one month's rent). The security deposit is refundable, as long as the property is returned in the same condition as it was received. Some landlords may ask for, not only the security deposit, but also the first month's rent up front.

Common Problems

While living in your apartment/house, you may have questions about your rights and your landlord's responsibilities. You may, unfortunately, experience problems or have issues that you are not quite sure how to deal with. Research the [Wisconsin Code](#) for information regarding the following:

Getting Repairs

- When you need a repair made in your apartment/house, you usually call your landlord to make the repair request. This is fine, but you need to always follow-up in writing. Send the written request to your landlord (hand deliver and get signed by office representative or certified mail) and always keep a copy for your records.
- The landlord typically has up to 30 days to repair non-emergency problems. If after 30 days of receiving the repair request in writing, the landlord has still not fixed the problem, you have a few options. Remember: You must be current on your rent.

Problems with Your Landlord

- **Sexual Harassment & Discrimination** - If you feel you have been sexually harassed by your landlord or his/her employee, contact legal representation immediately. If you feel your landlord or their employee has discriminated against you, contact legal representation immediately.
- **Sale of Property** - During your lease term, it is possible that your landlord will sell the building you are living in. Even if you get a new landlord mid-year, your current lease still remains valid (but exceptions to exist).
- **Unlawful Entry** - Your landlord is required to provide notice prior to entering the premises in non-emergency instances. If you are having issues with your landlord entering unlawfully, contact *legal representation* immediately.
- **Eviction** - Your landlord has the right to evict a tenant for various reasons. Your landlord must follow certain procedures when evicting a tenant. If you are being evicted, you should contact legal representation immediately!
- **Noisy Neighbors** - If you are having issues with neighbors being excessively loud and disruptive, contact your landlord immediately so that they are aware of the situation. If the problem persists, you may want to contact the police to report a noise disturbance. Make sure to keep a copy of the police report for your records, and send a copy to your landlord. If you are being evicted for noise violations, make sure you are aware of your rights and responsibilities. Contact legal representation immediately.