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The Must-Have Guide to Moving and Storage in the Military

Did you know the average military family moves **every 2-3 years**? In fact, estimates have found that military families relocate 2.5 times more often than civilian families. Whether it's your first move or your fifteenth, it's always good to have a little bit of help to prepare for the process ahead. We want to help you with the process ahead, so your move will go as smoothly as possible. Here are some tips to help you with the process of your next military move.

The Beginnings of a Military Move

Your military move begins when you receive your Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders. At this point, you will begin the process of **planning for your move** from one duty station to another or from your final duty station to your home of retirement or discharge.

The process itself is similar to the process of a civilian move, with a few exceptions. These are:

- *Timeline* - If you are living in military housing at your existing station or new station, you may face some delays or timeline troubles as you adjust your timeline to the timeline of your housing. Sometimes this will require a stay in temporary housing while you wait for your true housing option to become available. Also, you may have anywhere from 5 months to 2 weeks to report, which means you also may not have much time to plan for the move.
- *Costs* - The military **will cover the costs** associated with a PCS move, including personal and dependent travel, shipment of goods and vehicles, temporary lodging reimbursement and an allowance for expenses incurred during the move (dislocation allowance).

- *Paperwork* - Get used to keeping receipts, because you are going to have mountains of paperwork in the coming days.

When you get your PCS orders, there are some **basic things you should do first**, before you start thinking about storage and planning. These are:

- Meet with the base transportation office for your branch.
- Contact the family center at your new location.
- Notify housing office of your move if you live in government housing.
- Meet with the finance office at your installation for budget help.
- Start looking for your new housing choices.

When moving with the military, you have two basic options - to have the military pay for the move or to do the job yourself (DITY). **DITY or personally procured moves** are more stressful, but they can put money back in your pocket. In fact, if you do a DITY move, you will be paid 95 percent of what the government estimates it would cost to move you.

If you spend less than this, you can keep the rest. It is possible to spend less than this amount, putting more money into your pocket. In addition, you will give yourself more time to make the move, because the military understands that it takes time to pack and move. On the other hand, if you allow the military to pay for the move, you have less stress and can focus on other important aspects of the move while the movers handle the grunt work.

What to Keep and What to Toss

Military life and excessive belongings do not work well together. Regular moves mean that you're going to need to pair down your belongings with some frequency to make the moves a little less tedious. Even if you're having your home professionally packed and unpacked, you may be limited on the amount of weight you can bring with you on your PCOS. You will need to get rid of items that you simply don't need.

To do this, create **three boxes for each area you're packing**, one for "keep," one for "sell," and one for "trash." Then, go through each shelf, drawer, cabinet and closet in your home, starting with the trash and then moving on to the items that are still useful. Determine whether or not you wish to use those items in your new home, and place in the appropriate box. If you're having movers, you can then transfer the "keep" box back to the shelf or drawer, but you will have eliminated things you no longer need or things that are garbage.

How can you make the determination? Some items that should be tossed or donated automatically include:

- Clothing or tools you haven't touched in a year.
- Expired or outdated food and clothing items.
- Toys your kids have outgrown that hold no sentimental value.

- Items that you have never opened.
- Broken items.

Items that you should definitely keep include:

- Sentimental items.
- Items that have a clear purpose.
- Clothing your children will soon grow into.
- Most furniture, unless it's house specific.
- Documents that are important to your military career.

How to Prep

Your first temptation when you receive PCS orders is to start packing. Unless you are opting for a DITY move, you don't need to do this. In fact, doing so could be a waste of time, because chances are high the movers will simply come in, unpack the boxes you have packed, and repack them their way. They have to do this to ensure nothing is broken for which they could be held liable.

That said, there are some things you can do to prepare for the day. Here are some ideas:

- Decide which papers you need to keep with you on your move. Password sheets, medical information, passports, bills coming due soon and other things you need to keep life moving ahead during the transition should be put somewhere safe and separate.
- Pull everything off your walls, because the movers won't do that for you. Tape the hangers, screws, bolts and other hardware to the item, or put it all into one box labeled "decorative hardware" so you are ready to hang your photos when you get to your new home.
- Prep the car. You're going to have to drive a ways, so make sure the car is ready for a long drive.
- **Get the kids ready.** Register for school, find a dentist and pediatrician and make all of the changes you can to ensure you can jump into life when you get there.
- Keep parts together. Yes, your movers will disassemble and move your items, but they aren't going to be careful to ensure all of the screws are kept together and all of the chargers and cords remain organized. Ensure that you're not left with a mess by keeping parts together. Use **Ziploc baggies** to keep screws from your furniture together, and tape them right to the piece of furniture they came from. Bind cords together, label them and tape them to the device they run.
- Set a budget. One of the benefits of military moves is the fact that your moving costs may be covered, but all of the additional costs of a move are going to add up. From buying new toiletries when you can't find yours in your boxes to eating out for multiple meals, you'll need a budget and some time to set aside money for those needs. You'll also need to plan for your security deposit or down payment on your new housing in your budget.
- **Pack a First Day Box or Bag.** This will have your items that you will need on your first day in

your new home. Things like clothing, toiletries, box cutters and snacks can get you through the chaos of your first day without too many trips to the commissary.

How to Label

Labeling is going to be key as you prepare for your movers to come. Here are some labeling tips that will ensure your move is as stress-free as possible.

- **Clearly label items you don't want the movers to touch.** They are trained to come in and move everything, so you need to be clear. You may even set aside a room and label it as off limits, then stash all of the items you wish to move yourself in that room.
- Label all storage totes before the movers arrive. If you have a garage or basement full of totes that contain old kid's clothes, Christmas decorations, extra linens and more, label them yourself. Your movers will likely just put "basement tote" on these bins, leaving you with 30 or so bins to sort when you are looking for the Christmas lights at your new home.
- Instruct the movers on your labeling needs. Movers take the easiest road when it comes to packing, so make sure they know what each room is called and how you wish for them to label. You can also follow them and add to the label they put on each box.
- Clearly label items intended for storage.

Labeling will make the job of unpacking and getting settled much easier, so be a stickler for proper labeling throughout the days ahead.

The Inside Scoop on Storage

Storage is going to be your friend in a military move. **Self-storage**, which may even be paid for by the military, gives you a place to stash your stuff while you are overseas, in transition or simply in an area where you don't need seasonal items that you may need later. That said, when you use storage, you are increasing the number of transitions your belongings see, because they will be moved from your home to the storage unit and then from the storage unit to your new home at some point. Here are some ways you can help to protect your items while in storage.

- *Pack them in plastic tubs* - Many items are susceptible to pests or water damage. While your **self storage facility** will have measures to prevent these risks, they are still a risk. Plastic storage tubs are stronger and more secure than cardboard boxes for long-term storage.
- *Space saver bags* - Are you stashing your snow clothes while you move to the south? Use space saver bags for fabric items to take up less space and provide a more watertight seal. Add the sealed bags to plastic tubs for additional protection.
- *Wrapping large furniture* - If you're storing large pieces of furniture, wrap them with old blankets to prevent damage from pieces sliding against each other.

In addition, if you've used a storage unit prior to your move, such as when decluttering to put your home for sale, make sure you bring those items back to your home so the movers will take them.

What to Move Yourself

No matter how careful your movers are, chances are something will get broken during your move. Prevent a true tragedy by moving important and irreplaceable items yourself. However, keep in mind that, especially if you are flying, you're going to have to choose carefully so you're not loaded down with items while in transition. Here are some items that are best to move yourself:

- *Liquids* - Perfume, shampoo and liquids of all types may be something the movers refuse to handle. Try to use up as much of this as you can before you leave, but take important liquids with you.
- *Bedroom Items* - What do you need to go to bed at night? From baby monitors to noise machines and breathing apparatus, make sure the vital bedroom essentials are kept out.
- *Crucial Documents* - Keep your crucial documents on your person at all times.
- *One Set of Linens* - Don't spend your first night in your new home digging through all of the boxes marked "linens" to find your sheets. Keep one set out for each bed.
- *Extremely Fragile Items* - The vase you have that was your great-great-grandmother's is not something you want to trust to strangers. Keep extremely fragile, valuable or sentimental items with you, if you can.
- *Clothing* - Have clothing for a few days available.

Special Considerations for Military Moves

In addition to the previous tips, keep these important considerations in mind as you prepare and plan for your military move:

- **Create a PCS binder.** You're going to have a lot of paperwork with a military move, and the binder gives you a place to keep it all accessible and organized. You can even buy PCS binders that are already organized and divided and just waiting for your documents.
- **Separate professional gear.** Your professional gear does not count towards weight allowance, so set it aside to ensure it's not added to the overall weight. This can be several hundred pounds worth of equipment, so it's worth taking the time to separate it and claim this exemption.
- **Consider a full unpack.** Many families are not aware that this can be included in the price of your move.
- Take a photo inventory of your belongings. This will help you keep tabs on everything during and after the move. If you're tracking serial numbers, take a photo of the item and then a photo of the serial number immediately after. For electric and electronic items, photograph them actually working. This will give you proof should you need to file a claim with your moving company.
- Make arrangements for kids and pets on moving day. While they can be around on moving day, everything will go more smoothly if they are with a friend. If possible, find a place for your kids to go and put your dog in a doggy day care on moving day.

- Plan for a place to sleep after the movers take your beds. Whether you budget for a hotel or plan to bunk on air mattresses in your home, you need a place to lay your head.
- Know that peak relocation season is May through August. If you receive PCS orders during this time, make sure you act quickly to reserve a moving company and storage facilities, as shortages are common.
- Save your boxes. They'll come in handy for the next PCS.

Where to Get More Help for Your Military Move

- [Military.com](#) has a number of resources for your move
- [Military One Source](#) resources for moving
- [Move.mil](#)
- [Parent Companion](#) resources for military moves
- [Operation We Are Here](#) military move resources
- [Navy Guidelines for a Smooth Move](#)
- [Army Relocation Benefits](#)
- [Marine Corps Moving Tips](#)
- [Air Force Moving Guide](#)
- [National Guard - How to Move to Another State](#)

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