

# Before, During and After the Move

A relocation checklist can minimize potential issues



BY DARRYL ROOT, R/W-RAC

Although the relocation professional's first priority is to successfully relocate any displacees, the tasks that occur before, during and after the property is vacant are also very important. Proper coordination between the relocation agent and the property management agent is crucial. And a relocation checklist can help ensure nothing falls through the cracks.

## Before Vacating the Property

Proper communication with the displacee is vitally important. They should be told verbally and in writing what is expected at move out. Many agencies have a checklist of what should be done prior to vacating that can be given to displacees to assist them. This checklist will include everything from making sure all utilities have been turned off to scheduling the pickup of large items and unwanted furniture.

If the displacee elects to use a professional mover, the relocation agent should coordinate with both parties so that there is no mistake in what is being moved and what remains. If the displacee elects to move himself, there must be a pre-approved Self Move Agreement in place prior to the move. Many agencies have adopted a "broom

clean" standard for structures. In other words, while displacees are not required to professionally clean the premises prior to vacating, the area must be free of trash and other debris. The land surrounding the structures should also be free of trash and possible safety issues, such as sheds, crumbling walkways and other tripping hazards. The property manager and relocation agent should work together early on to prepare a comprehensive property management plan to address these concerns.

## During the Move

For liability purposes, the relocation agent should personally monitor the move, especially when it comes to what items can be moved and what should remain. Many times, displacees will agree during the negotiation process to sell certain furniture, fixtures and equipment in order to increase their compensation. Unless those items are salvaged back from the agency, they should remain at the property.

If there is both a landlord and tenant on the property, there should be a clear, written delineation of what

personal property is owned by each. If not, it is likely that whatever is not removed on move out day will be attributed to the other. The relocation agent can become caught in a "blame game" of who is responsible for moving personal property. The relocation agent should document the progress of the move by taking pictures as proof of what was taken and what was left behind.

The displacee should be reminded of the broom clean standard that was discussed earlier in negotiations. In some states, when a displacee leaves items behind that were included in their move cost entitlement, the cost for the agency to have those items removed may be deducted from the moving entitlement. Besides placing trash into the street, some displacees have resorted to parking unwanted vehicles in the street in hopes the City will tow them off. In most states, vehicles cannot be properly removed from a parcel unless there is evidence of title. It is the responsibility of the displacee to dispose of the vehicle at the junkyard or transport it to the replacement site. If the displacee elects to leave certain items behind that the agency agrees to accept with possession of the parcel, they must note the items and sign a Certificate of Abandonment. This will eliminate any potential for ownership issues after the agency disposes of the items.



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Similarly, the displacee should not leave the property in an unsafe condition. For example, some may try to strip copper wiring and other structural items from the premises that are legally part of the real estate and belong to the agency. Their removal will render the structure unsafe, creating a potentially dangerous situation for squatters who often try to occupy vacant buildings. In addition, demolition contractors base their bids on the value of items that are left at the subject property. When these items are wrongfully removed, this increases the cost of demolition.

#### After the Move

The relocation agent should not accept possession or keys prior to documenting that the parcel is in acceptable condition. Otherwise, they risk taking on potential liability for

unsafe conditions on the property. Likewise, if the agency has approved a funding advance to assist a displacee using a self-move to vacate, the remaining balance should not be given to the displacee until the property is confirmed to be in good condition. In the unlikely event that displacees vacate prior to close of escrow, they should be advised that the responsibility for security and risk of loss rests with them until escrow closes. When the keys are accepted, they should be turned over to the property manager as soon as possible so that the property can be secured.

Successful relocation of the displacee involves a number of tasks that should be coordinated between the relocation agent and the property manager. This requires a collaborative working relationship, as well as a comprehensive relocation checklist. A smooth hand off of the property is possible when both sides work together. ✪



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