

Ten tips for relocation readiness

By Erin K. Witt

Moving can be a stressful time in the best of circumstances. Along with the sentimental hardships of leaving familiar surroundings, family, and friends, moving can be a logistical nightmare.

Luckily, with a little proactive planning—and the following helpful hints—moving can be less of a headache and more of an adventure.

Tip #1: Get an early start. Experts suggest beginning to plan a move—especially an interstate relocation—at least 6-8 weeks in advance. Leaving ample time for packing and organization will make the experience much less stressful. Also, be sure to start looking for your moving company at least 30-45 days prior to your anticipated move. Most moving companies are extremely busy during the last week of the month, so it is necessary to plan ahead and secure a reservation for the date you want.

Tip #2: Make a plan. Prepare a written plan with a timetable and specific milestones. The move won't feel so overwhelming if you break it down into parts. Start a central file for all of the details on your move, and collect receipts for moving-related expenses, too.

Tip #3: Clean it up, and clear it out. Take an objective look at what you own, and decide what must go and what can be left behind. Extra weight costs more money if you are using a moving company, and is simply added hassle if you are moving yourself. Organize a garage sale to decrease clutter.

Tip #4: Pack it up. When you start packing, label the contents of all boxes, and pack carefully. Box essential items together, and write "Open First/Load Last" on these boxes. When you move into your new home, you'll be able to easily identify these boxes and get to important items like pots, dishes, silverware, alarm clocks, bedding, pillows, towels, and essential items for babies or children.

Tip #5: Wrangle up your records. Learn what's needed for a new driver's license in your new state, and schedule the exam if one is necessary. Transfer your car registration and insurance to the new location, too. Contact your doctors, dentist, and veterinarian to receive copies of medical records, and call your children's schools to arrange for records to be forwarded to your new school district.

Tip #6: Leave a forwarding address. Notify the post office, magazines, credit card companies and friends and family of your change of address. The U. S. Postal Service offers a kit to make this process easier, available at www.usps.com.

Tip #7: Turn it on, turn it off. Contact utilities to schedule disconnection of services on the day following your move—you'll need them on while you're still in the house. Arrange for service to start the day before you move into your new home, so you have service when you arrive. You should account for phone, electric, gas, cable TV, Internet,

security systems, and any other any other monthly services. Set some money aside for required deposits, too.

Tip #8: Deduct it! If you are moving for a new job, check with the company to see if they offer relocation stipends. In this situation, you may also be able to deduct some of your moving costs if you meet all of the following requirements:

- You must move within one year of starting your new job.
- Your new job must be at least 50 miles farther from your old home than your old job was.
- The distance between your new home and new job can't be greater than between your new home and new job, unless your new commute will save you time or money, or if your employer insisted on the move as a condition of your employment.
- You must work full-time at the new workplace for 39 of the 52 weeks following the move. If you are self-employed, you must work full-time for at least 39 weeks during the first 12 months and a total of 78 weeks during the first 24 months after arriving at the new job location.

Deductions include travel or transportation costs and expenses for lodging and storing your household goods.

Tip #9: Leave it to the professionals. Before relocating, call three or four companies for a written quote. Check with the Better Business Bureau and make sure there are no complaints against the company, and seek recommendations from friends and coworkers. When comparing the companies' quotes, don't just look at price alone—some companies may include packing services, while others require that you pack your belongings yourself. Determine what package best meets your needs, but make sure you are comparing apples to apples. Insurance is also an added plus.

Tip #10: Plan for your pets. Federal regulations prohibit moving companies from shipping animals in moving vans. Do not feed your pet for at least three hours before leaving on a trip, and take your dog for a walk just before you start the drive. You will still have to stop along the way, but your dog will be more comfortable as the trip gets underway. During stops, provide fresh drinking water for your dog and offer a treat for being a good traveler. If the drive is eight hours or longer, give your cat the opportunity to use a litter pan and offer fresh drinking water. Birds and small pets, such as gerbils and hamsters, can generally travel in their cages if you are going by car.