

# TIDBITS FOR RENTING DOWNTOWN

## LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

This tidbits page was designed for service members who are thinking of renting in our local community. It provides guidelines about legal and financial obligations that can occur when renting and has suggestions about seeking help to buy a home.

We encourage all new arrivals to visit us at the Military Housing Office before entering into any lease agreement for off-base housing. It is important to ensure you are aware of the **do's** and **don'ts** for living in the local community. Our Military Housing Office staff is knowledgeable and capable professionals who can save you valuable time, money and minimize some inconveniences of relocating. Our one collective effort is to provide the best possible service to you – the service member.

**Be Aware** - As with any assignment comes challenges, Malmstrom is certainly no exception! Please plan ahead prior to arriving to Malmstrom to ensure your family has a place to reside temporarily if you will be applying for On-Base Privatized Housing. Renting in the local community poses serious constraints, pre-planning and researching are going to be your best courses of action. There are a limited amount of rentals available, especially if you are looking for a temporary, affordable, 1 or 2-bedroom unit, and our locale BAH tends to be lower than some other bases'.

Month-to-month renting poses another issue if you're trying to secure on-base housing, and having pets hinders your options even further. Great Falls simply lacks the more common multi-unit apartment complexes and gated communities that other bases/cities offer. Start your rental search in advance to take care of you and your dependents.

Some sites to find available rentals:

- Homes.mil (this site lists only DoD-sponsored units and inspected by the housing office)
- AHRN.com
- Zillow.com
- Hotpads.com
- Zumper.com
- Rents.com
- Apartments.com
- GREAT FALLS RENTALS (Facebook)
- Trulia.com
- AirBnB

*\* Disclaimer: "No government endorsement implied or intended"*

### **Malmstrom Lodging (TLF)**

Call (406) 731-3394 (DSN 632-3394) to check availability and make reservations for your arrival. Limited units available and only a few are pet friendly so please call ahead of time to reserve.

**Application:** More than likely, you will be asked to fill out an application for any rental you are interested in. Be aware that the Property Manager/Landlord might ask for an application fee (which is used to do either a credit or background check). It is helpful to have a copy of your current credit report to help speed up the process.

**The Lease:** The lease itself is a contract containing the rights and obligations of the Landlord and tenant.

**Carefully review** all conditions of the lease before you sign on the dotted line. There may be portions that you don't understand or it may contain a provision that you don't agree with—for example, restrictions on guests,

pets, design alterations, etc. A lease must accurately describe the premises to be leased. It must state rental cost, length of lease, date lease begin and end dates, and what's provided by the Landlord and tenant. **Verbal or other agreements to alter the terms of the lease have no legal standing.** Therefore, it is essential to include all the terms desired in the written lease so that no misunderstanding will arise later.

**Military Clause:** Every military tenant should inquire about a "military clause" being included in the lease. The clause generally states that, subject to the payment of a specified amount, the tenant can terminate the lease. It provides the military tenant a way to end a lease prematurely for reasons connected with military service such as deployments over 90 days, PCS, and entering or separation from service. **NOTE: The Military Clause does NOT and will not apply to terminate your lease early in order to move into Base Housing.**

If you are on the waiting list for on-base housing, be sure that the Landlord is informed and understands that you will probably be relocating into Military Family Housing when available and/or when your lease has been met. Even though you are accepting on-base quarters you are still required to give written 30-day notice to your Landlord (unless other arrangements have been made in writing). If this presents a problem, explain your situation to the representative from the Military Housing Office to discuss all possible options.

**Deposits:** It's common practice for Landlords to require a security, damage, and/or cleaning deposit upfront. You should be concerned in protecting your own interests for when you vacate so that your initial deposit will be refunded. To help in recovering your deposit there are certain steps you MUST take from the moment you move in. One of the most important factors that will determine whether or not you receive your full deposit back is taking good care of your residence while you are living there and upon vacating taking responsibility for damage and/or cleaning your rental. Take care of your rental and leave it better than when you moved in, if you break something report it immediately to your Landlord.

**Inspections:** During the move-in you should do a "Walk-Through" of the property with the Landlord to identify anything you do not want to be held accountable for when it comes time to move out. See our "Rental Condition Discrepancy Form" back on our main page under HELPFUL LINKS/LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY. It is highly recommended, if the Landlord is not available for a walk through, that you complete a "Rental Condition Discrepancy Form" and take date stamped photos of any existing damages, if needed. Present original discrepancy form & photos to the Landlord within a week of moving in, as well as maintain copies for yourself. Understand the Landlord's expectations up front (for example: how they want to be notified of problems or situations, etc.) Keep in mind flexibility and cooperation will create a better relationship and environment for you and/or your family. Understanding NOW could very well defer unwanted costs later. 😊

During the time you occupy the rental, be a good tenant and advise the Landlord of any required maintenance before it becomes a huge problem. Keep a record of such requirements. Proper notification and flexibility to a certain extent will avoid unnecessary conflict and make for better relations in the long run.

**Renter's Insurance:** It is strongly encouraged to acquire renter's insurance when living in a rental unit (this even includes on-base housing and dorms). Your Landlord's insurance policy typically will not cover your losses due to theft or damage, flooding, fire, etc. Renter's insurance is a small price to pay monthly (possibly under \$10) to ensure your property is covered from loss due to theft, damage caused by other people, or natural disasters; if you don't need that much coverage check with your insurance company for other cheaper policy options. The Military OneSource website can answer any questions you may have... for a few dollars your property could be covered in the event that something unexpected happens <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/moving-housing/housing/home-disaster-planning/renters-insurance-do-i-really-need-it>

**Move out Instructions:** When you are ready to move out, make sure that you give your Landlord the proper notification. You should **ALWAYS**, per Montana Law, give written notice at least 30 days prior to your termination date (even if your Landlord doesn't require it). Proper preparation can help to defer costs and

possibly secure the return of your deposits. Prepare in advance for costly damages that you may need to pay for or repair. Call your utilities companies to find out how to terminate or transfer services in advance (ie. Satellite/dish, internet, gas, water, utilities, etc.). A link on our main page lists various local companies and their numbers, look under HELPFUL LINKS/GENERAL INFO. It's best not to wait until the week you're moving out to start making all these calls. Make sure to clean your place and leave it better than when you received it. Use our "Rental Move-Out Cleaning Checklist" as a bare minimum to clean prior to turning in your keys. There is a copy of this checklist on our main page under HELPFUL LINKS/LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY.

A preliminary inspection should take place no later than 2 weeks prior to vacating. This is to confirm that you and your Landlord are in agreement as to what you are responsible for cleaning and/or cost of damages. You should, at this time, present your copy of your initial "Rental Condition Discrepancy Form" and photos from when you first moved in. This is an invaluable tool for settling any difference of opinion and arriving at a fair decision. In general, this means knowing the requirements to recover your deposits and identification of any damage repairs you are responsible for.

The final inspection should be set for the proper time, don't set the final inspection for the same day that you are moving and cleaning. The success rate of this type of move is almost always low. Make sure to allow yourself time to move your belongings, fix anything you need to fix, and clean anything you need to clean. This will ensure that your deposit is returned to you and a positive impression will be left of you with your Landlord leading to better references for yourself in the future.

**Pet Tip:** If your Landlord allowed you to have a pet during your tenancy, upon your move out ask for him/her to write a statement on your behalf, that you were a responsible pet owner and that your pet behaved in an acceptable manner while you lived there. Keep these letters for future reference, in case you find it difficult to find a rental later that allows pets.

**Moving On to a New Base?** Take a minute to use the HEAT (Housing Early Assistance Tool) website to request a housing application or info from your next base. To learn more about HEAT and to apply for on-base housing at your next base follow this website [www.homes.mil/heat/DispatchServlet/Back?Mod=HeatWelcome&SSRedir=true](http://www.homes.mil/heat/DispatchServlet/Back?Mod=HeatWelcome&SSRedir=true). Each base housing is different, it is a good idea to contact the MHO at your next base for their specific requirements.

**Change of Address:** Don't forget to complete a Change of Address through the United States Postal Service. Go to this website to change your address, put a hold on your mail or forward it: <https://www.usa.gov/post-office>