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## Renter information: rental location, selection and roommates

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### Quick Facts

A person who considers rental property should check the reputation of the prospective landlord, examine the liveability of the rental housing (environment, health and safety, services, utilities) and inspect the rental unit thoroughly.

The Colorado Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination of any kind in the rental or leasing of most rental property.

Selection of a roommate should be done with regard to certain legal, financial and personal implications that may affect the living group later.

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### Location

As soon as a person knows rental housing will be needed, the search should begin. The earlier a person starts looking, the more likely the prospect of finding satisfactory arrangements.

Local sources of information for available rentals include newspapers, realtors, the housing office of nearby colleges and universities, and bulletin boards in public locations (i.e., supermarkets, laundromats). A rental location agency also may be useful in locating an apartment or house.

### Selection

There are several considerations in the selection of desirable rental property.

**Reputation and practices of prospective**

**landlord.** It is best to question the present tenants. Visit the rental unit to find out how satisfied the residents are with the landlord, especially regarding repairs, rent increases and general promises made by the landlord or manager.

**Liveability of rental housing.** Factors to be considered in the selection of rental housing will differ from person to person and family to family. The following list will give some ideas to consider.

<sup>1</sup>Original text by Colorado State University Student Legal Services and Alice M. Morrow, former Cooperative Extension faculty. Reviewed by Judy McKenna, Cooperative Extension family resource management specialist and associate professor; and Office of Renter's Information, Student Legal Services (6/89)

- **Environment:** traffic, parking space for tenants and visitors, temporary parking for service and delivery vehicles, noise, smoke, dust, odors, adjacent dwellings, general neighborhood, access to public transportation, access to shopping areas.

- **Health and safety:** crime rates (check with local police), pets (restrictions on pets in building and neighborhood), fire exits and routes present and clearly marked, lighting on streets and walks, police protection, building security, railing on stairways, locks on doors, locks on windows.

- **Services:** maintenance and repair, garbage and trash collection, care of public areas and building exterior.

- **Recreation:** play areas for children, space for social gathering and hobbies.

- **Design characteristics:** outside appearance, view from windows, interior space, privacy, storage, laundry facilities, wall and floor coverings, room arrangement, size of rooms, sound insulation, lighting, efficiency and convenience of kitchen and dining areas, appliances, work areas, adequate storage.

- **Utilities:** heating and cooling systems, telephone and television installation available, convenient light switches, ventilation to exterior in bath and kitchen, low plumbing noise level.

**Inspection of rental unit.** A person should inspect the inside and outside of the premises thoroughly before renting. If repairs are needed, arrangements should be made in writing with the landlord for these to be done by a stated date. A damage inventory should be made before moving in.

## Discrimination

The Colorado Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, national origin, ancestry, marital status, religion or physical handicap. This prohibition concerns the transfer, sale, rental or leasing of all premises except the following: nonprofit, fraternal, educational or social organizations/clubs; and rooms offered for rent or lease in a single family dwelling maintained and occupied in part by the owner or lessee as his or her household.

If renters feel that they have been the victims of discrimination as prohibited in the Fair Housing Act, they should contact the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, 1525 Sherman St., 6th Floor, Denver, Colorado 80203 (303) 866-2621.

Many cities also have laws that prohibit housing discrimination. To find out about a prospective community, check with local city officials.

Landlords cannot discriminate in ways prohibited by law. That is they cannot discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, national origin, ancestry, marital status or religion.

Landlords can discriminate in ways that are not prohibited by law. For example, landlords can refuse to rent to students or people with pets.

Many times it is difficult to determine whether or not discrimination is prohibited by law. In this

instance, contact the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, local civil rights office, legal aid office or a private attorney.

## Choosing Roommates

Selection of a roommate should be done with regard to certain legal, financial and personal implications that may affect members of a living group.

The following issues have been known to cause conflict between household members and should be discussed thoroughly before housing arrangements are finalized.

- **Standards of cleanliness,** especially when pets are involved; responsibility for housekeeping chores, cooking, shopping, etc.

- **Study habits,** noise level, enjoyment of music, partying and entertainment.

- **Late hours,** general attitudes and values concerning liquor, drugs, overnight guests, guests at odd hours.

- **The personality,** age and backgrounds of prospective roommates.

- **Budgeting:** Who is responsible for coordinating payment of rent, utilities, groceries and other expenses being shared by all members of the household? (Payment by check can alleviate some misunderstanding on these matters.)

- **Spending habits:** How much can a person afford to pay for rent, utilities, phones, etc.? What standard of living is each individual group member accustomed to?

- **Borrowing articles** of clothing, food, personal effects, books, bicycles, cars, etc.

- **Children** in the household

- **Television habits,** hours and programs

- **Heating and air conditioning:** Will temperatures be comfortable and agreeable?

- **Working hours:** Will shifts and times be compatible?

- **Eating habits,** special diets, cooking habits

- **Length of lease and commitment to living unit**

Another aspect roommates should be familiar with is **joint and several liability**. Most individuals assume that when everyone signs a common lease or contract, each individual is responsible for a share of the rent. If all sign separate contracts, this is true; however, the majority of contracts or leases is handled in a way in which all parties on the contract are responsible for the performance of their roommates; i.e., the entire rent.

If one roommate moves out without paying his or her share of the rent, the remaining tenants must come up with that share and assume responsibility for damages. Roommates have recourse by either holding the security deposit from persons moving out or taking them to court, providing they have signed the contract.

(For more information on renting, see Service in Action sheets 9.903, *Renter information: security deposits*; 9.904, *Renter information: leases*; and 9.905, *Renter information: evictions and landlord liens*.)