

Financial Tips for a Smooth PCS Move

Paying for Your Move

- **Establish an emergency fund:** Moves can be expensive. As you prepare for a transfer, an emergency savings fund should be a top priority. Your emergency fund should have six months' worth of your current living expenses and payments. If you have not already established an emergency fund as part of your current financial plan, you should create or build this fund as soon as you expect PCS orders. Savings are vital to your financial health because they provide you with a buffer against unplanned or unexpected expenses, like emergencies and car or home repairs. If you have a healthy savings account, you will not need to incur additional debt or use money earmarked for other purposes when you are faced with a PCS move. Although you will receive travel allowances, there are usually additional expenses and purchases associated with moving and settling into a new home.
- **Keep receipts:** Keep track of and save receipts for all expenses you incur that will not be reimbursed. Marines on active duty who move because of a PCS can make a deduction when calculating their federal income taxes for unreimbursed moving expenses. Such expenses may include those costs related to personally procured moves, moving an extra car, packing, crating, in-transit storage, hauling a trailer, and additional travel and lodging expenses.
- **Save in transit:** While you are in transit, you can save money. There are phone applications to locate the least expensive gas in all areas. Also, many hotels, restaurants, and entertainment venues offer military discounts upon request. Lower your food expenses by purchasing food, beverages, and snacks from your commissary that travel well while in transit. An ice chest for perishables and beverages makes a big difference.

Moving Your Belongings

- **Determine if you prefer a Personally Procured Move:** Typically, with a PCS move the government hires a commercial contractor to pack and move household goods at no cost to the Marine, up to the authorized weight limit. If you do not want to use a contractor provided by the government, however, you can elect a Personally Procured Move (PPM) using your own vehicle, using rental equipment, or hiring your own commercial company. Using the PPM program, military members can receive reimbursement up to 100 percent of the amount it would have cost the government to move their personal property (i.e., Government Constructive Cost or GCC) if they hire a commercial carrier, or an incentive payment of 95 percent of GCC if they move the property themselves. An advance payment of a percentage of the estimated reimbursement claim can be authorized to offset the out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., equipment, packing materials, insurance, contractor, fuel, tolls) for the move.

While a PPM can be an attractive option, it is important to note that there are many rules that accompany this form of relocation such as: prior approval, empty and full certified weight tickets, bona fide rental equipment, fuel and toll receipts, etc. Additionally, unless very well-researched and well-planned cost estimates have been made, a PPM is often more expensive than anticipated. It is very important that you do not over estimate your weight, or you will owe the government some of the payment. It is important that you contact your Personal Property Office (PPO) MARADMIN 128/19: <https://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/Messages-Display/Article/1773740/2019>, and use the resources on Move.mil to help you determine the most cost-effective form for your move.

- **Trim your belongings:** Is there anything you may not want to take to your next duty location that you could sell before leaving? For example, if you are leaving New Jersey and heading to Hawaii, chances are you might not want to take that snow blower or extra heaters. Have a yard sale to sell items you no longer want or need. If it has not been used in a year, sell it. This will help you to stay below your weight limit on your household goods and earn some extra cash for the move.
- **Complete an inventory:** Before the packers arrive, complete a detailed inventory of all household goods, including the model and serial number of all high-value items. Photos and/or video are a great way to document your property and its condition prior to packing. Carry a copy of the inventory with you—do not pack it away. Consider carrying with you any items that you consider priceless, such as family heirlooms, pictures, or items of emotional value.
- **Consider additional insurance:** Consider getting additional insurance on your household goods to cover potential losses beyond what the Marine Corps reimburses. Often, your homeowner's or renter's insurance will cover your household goods in shipment. Check with your current insurer for rates and review your policy as to whether your current insurance reimburses for any damaged or lost items at replacement value or actual cash value. *Replacement value* reimburses you for the cost to replace the item with the same or similar item at the present time and according to its current value. *Actual cash value* is the replacement value minus the depreciation of the property.

Managing Your Creditors and Banks

- **Review your credit report:** Review your credit report to ensure it is accurate before a transfer. If you note any inaccuracies, you can work to resolve them before they become an issue later in the move. You can get a free copy of your credit report once a year at www.annualcreditreport.com. If you plan to rent, your potential landlord will want to check your credit report. If you plan to purchase a home, your credit report is a major factor in the pricing and approval process for a mortgage. Also, utility companies review your past payment history when determining the need for a deposit.
- **Notify all creditors:** Notify all creditors of your upcoming move (especially if OCONUS) so that you can avoid any missed statements, which can result in late payments, late fees, or increases in interest rates. You will also want to avoid having any statements stolen. Make sure you have updated all creditors with your new address and phone number and have given post office your forwarding address. Note that it is not uncommon for forwarded mail to take several weeks to catch up.
- **Meet all financial obligations:** Identify all financial obligations you must clear before you leave your current duty station. Make sure you have made all final payments on utilities, cell phones, and any other creditors and get receipts for proof of payment. Return any equipment such as cable TV equipment and collect a receipt. Make sure you cancel any local memberships, so you will not be billed for a service you are no longer able to access.
- **Collect deposits:** Think about what deposits you may be getting back on items like your rent or utilities. Generally, it takes several weeks before you will receive a payment in the mail on refunds for housing and utilities, so don't plan on having access to these funds to pay for your move.
- **Set up automatic bill pay:** Consider having your bills automatically drafted from your bank account. At a minimum, establish access to your accounts through the internet so you can update your information easily and ensure that you receive your bills in a timely manner.

- **Obtain reference letters:** Obtain letters of reference from current utility, cable, and telephone companies to reduce or eliminate deposit costs at your new location.
- **Use national providers:** Choose national providers whenever possible for phone, cable, and internet services. This will save you from having to find new services each time you move. Do price comparisons and confirm that the “bundle” package is really saving you money. If they offer you an introductory rate, confirm what the price will be after that period runs out.
- **Transfer bank accounts (if you need or want to do so):** Determine how you will handle the transfer of bank accounts and changes in cash flow. If possible, choose a financial institution that will move with you, so you will not have to keep closing and opening accounts. Find out if your bank has a local branch that you can use at your next duty station. Do not close your checking and savings accounts until you open new accounts at your new location. Also, ensure that all allotments and electronic fund transfers have been successfully shifted to the new account.
- **Get prequalified or preapproved for a home loan:** If you are going to be buying a home at your new duty station, prequalify or get preapproved at your bank or credit union for a home loan. Attend a class on home buying at your local installation, housing office, or a civilian location.

Taking Care of Family Issues

- **Maintain dependent health care:** If you are currently enrolled in TRICARE Prime, stay enrolled at the old duty station until you arrive at your new duty station. If you are transferring overseas, investigate TRICARE Europe or TRICARE Pacific (at www.tricare.mil). Contact the TRICARE Service Center in your new location to transfer enrollment. If you are not enrolled in TRICARE Prime, determine what health care facilities are available at the new duty station.
- **Fill prescriptions:** Before your move, fill your prescriptions and bring the medications with you rather than packing them. Doing this will ensure that important medications don’t get lost and that you don’t run out during the move.
- **Schools tip:** If you have children, take time to research the public schools and/or private schools at your new duty station. Reach out to School Liaison Program staff at your new installation.
- **Prepare for dual households, if applicable:** There are circumstances where Marine families find themselves with dual households, either short- or long-term. This can be for a variety of reasons such as the transfer timeframe is not conducive due to school schedules, employment, or housing issues. Maintaining two households is a difficult economic and emotional decision. Well in advance of your PCS, you should contact the PFM at your MCCS to discuss your situation and options. The good news is that the use of PCS entitlement can be deferred or delayed throughout the timeframe of the orders. Therefore, if the family is not able to all move at the beginning of the order period, the ability to have a government-funded household move is not lost.
- **Update Wills and Power of Attorney:** Visit your base legal office or a qualified legal assistance attorney at your new location to have your will reviewed to conform to the new state’s laws and to have a Power of Attorney (POA) prepared for all adults involved in the PCS, if needed. A POA can make handling PCS details easier for whichever adults are involved.
- **Take care of exceptional family member:** If you have a dependent with special health or education needs, any concerns should be fully explored during the detailing process. Contact the Exceptional Family Member (EFM) Liaison/Coordinator at your current duty station for information, if needed, and for the contact information of the EFM Liaison/Coordinator at your new duty station.

Learning About Your New Duty Station

- **Reach out to the Information & Referral Specialist at your current installation:** They can help you directly and put you in touch with other resources you require.
- **Reach out to your sponsor/another Marine family:** You may be assigned a sponsor at your next duty station. You should contact him or her with any questions you may have and to get someone else's perspective of the area. A Marine and his/her family who live at your next duty station are another great source of information for what the area feels like. You can gather facts and data, but the real living experience will be best expressed from a fellow Marine.
- **Do your research:** Use the internet to find articles from the local newspaper about your new area or check with the Better Business Bureau (BBB) for free information. Research how the everyday cost of living compares at your old and new duty stations. A good website for this is: www.bestplaces.net. With some pre-planning and advance research, you should be able to estimate what your expenses will be. Tracking any additional expenses incurred to get to your new duty station will help you stay on track financially and will help when planning your next move. DOD's MilitaryINSTALLATIONS tool is highly recommended for conducting research: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/>. Reaching out to the Information & Referral Specialist at the new installation is also a great idea. That person's information can be found at the MilitaryINSTALLATIONS page or from the I&R Specialist at your current installation.