

HOW TO GET YOUR FULL DEPOSIT BACK

So, you're moving out. Does cleaning your house or apartment feel like an insurmountable task? Are you worried that your deposit may be forfeited?

It is easy to get your full deposit back if you have a plan and spread the work out over ten days before you move out. Believe it or not, the landlord is anxious to return the deposit to you. Why? Because the unit will be available for immediate re-rental. He's thrilled to not have to hire someone to do the cleaning.

PACKING FOR THE MOVE

IMPORTANT: The move-out cleaning process outlined below simply will not work if you wait until the last minute to start packing. Each day, pack a few boxes starting with never used items and items that are not critical for day to day use – things like decorations, winter clothing if your are moving in the summer, etc. Then start packing your rarely used items – things you're sure you can live without for a week or so. Be sure to label each box carefully.

GETTING STARTED

So, where do you start? First, check to see what your move-in documentation says about the property condition when you moved in. If the documentation notes any deficiencies, you do not need to worry about rectifying these problems. If the documentation does not mention cleaning issues, or if there is no documentation, it is assumed that the apartment was in excellent condition when you took occupancy

CLEANING PRODUCTS

Second, take a look around your place and determine what cleaning agents you are going to need. Now is the time to go buy the strongest chemicals you can get at the grocery store for each application. Some of these products may be too strong for everyday use (or weekly use), but for a move-out clean they will save you elbow grease and really make things shine. Don't forget to read the back of the containers to determine what uses the products are safe for. If used on the wrong surface and cause damage, you will be held responsible.

Here is what we suggest you get:

- Lysol All Purpose Cleaner with Bleach
- Clorox Disinfecting Bathroom Cleaner
- Lysol Toilet Bowl Cleaner with Bleach

- Windex
- Easy-Off Heavy Duty Oven Cleaner (unless your oven is self-cleaning)
- Pinesol, which smells really nice for the last minute cleaning of your floors
- Scotch-Brite No-Scratch sponge pads

For any type of cleaner, the array of competing brands on the store shelves is dizzying. The products above were chosen over the competing brands because they have the highest concentration of the common active cleaning ingredients. If you choose other products, be careful to check what the active ingredient is on the product label. It makes no sense to get a kitchen cleaner and a bathroom cleaner that have the same active ingredients.

Also, you may think that you can get by with fewer products, and use, for example, the Lysol All Purpose Cleaner with Bleach in the bathroom. We still recommend that you also get the Clorox Disinfecting Bathroom Cleaner, as it has a different active ingredient (ammonium chloride instead of sodium hypochloride). Using the proper cleaner for a specific cleaning job doubles your chances of removing any stubborn stains in the bathroom (or in the kitchen),

For good lint-free rags, simply use an old T-shirt or two, or an old cotton kitchen towel. If your store carries them, the new micro-fiber rags are little pricey but really good.

TEN DAY PLAN... COUNT DOWN TO MOVE OUT DAY

Next, make that game plan. The easiest way to get a huge task done, is to break it down into smaller tasks to be performed, one a day (or night) during the ten days just before your move. Of course, you may need to change some tasks around – if you are an avid cook and can't stand the thought of not using your oven for five days before your move, but can go without a shower for five days without friends and colleagues complaining, by all means change the tasks around. The following is just an idea for what we think would work best for most of us:

Move-out Minus **Ten Days:** **HIGH AREAS**

Dedicate the first day to cleaning all high areas. Spend some time in each room. Look around the ceiling and high areas carefully – especially in the corners. You will need a sturdy ladder, feather or wool duster and damp rags.

Remove all cobwebs. Take down all glass light fixture covers. Wipe down the fixture and replace burnt out light bulbs. Wash glass light fixture covers carefully and replace. Dust all fans and fan blades. Clean the central heating uptake vent. Dust the top of all doors, and door frames. If there are tall ledges or built-in shelves, dust them too. Change the batteries in the smoke detectors, if needed.

Armed with a ladder, now would be a good time to clean the exhaust fan covers in the bathrooms. And, if you see any mildew in the bathrooms – especially on the ceilings and corners, wipe them down using the Clorox Disinfecting Bathroom Cleaner.

Does your landlord require you to get the carpets cleaned commercially? If so, organize it today.

Move-out Minus **Nine Days** **WINDOWS**

Dedicate the second evening to cleaning the windows, blinds, tracks and frames (also screens if you are renting a house). NOTE: You may want to check with your landlord or management company to find out how they want the cleaning of windows and window coverings handled. If it is your responsibility, there are companies that specialize in cleaning windows, tracks, blinds and screens. Hiring for this work to be done may be more cost effective (in terms of your time and liability if the blinds get damaged). Ask which company the property management company uses – perhaps they will give you a discount.

First, look at the window coverings. If the unit came with curtains or fabric blinds, these are best vacuumed with the brush attachment on your vacuum, or they can be dusted and brushed with a dry or barely damp rag (but be very careful that the rag does not leave lint, otherwise you may make matters much worse!). You can also use a fabric or clothes brush. If there are aluminum, vinyl or wood blinds, these need to be cleaned with a damp rag. Be sure to use caution and be gentle as blinds break easily. Also, don't forget to dust the valance that holds curtains or blinds up.

Next, clean windows using the Windex window cleaner per the instructions on the back of the bottle. Use a squeegee (if you have one and know how to use one). Otherwise, use a lint-free rag or old clean T-shirt. When you are done, make sure you look at the windowpane from different directions to catch any streaks you may have left.

The window tracks are most easily cleaned using a small brush (such as a toothbrush) to loosen the dirt. Then follow up with your vacuum using the small nozzle attachment. Lastly, clean the windowsills with a damp rag. If they show grime or stains, use some general purpose cleaner.

If you are renting a house you are probably responsible to maintain the exterior of the house. Today would be a good day to hose off the exterior of the house and garage to remove bugs and dirt and to wash the outside windows. Be sure to clean the exterior windows AFTER you hose down the house! You won't want to do this in the evening so try to squeeze these tasks in during daylight hours. If your unit comes with a garage, don't forget to clean the windows and doors and to sweep out the garage or carport.

Move-out Minus **Eight Days**
WALLS AND OUTSIDE AREAS

Remove any dirt, fingerprints, scuff marks, etc. from all doors, woodwork, molding, and baseboards (where accessible). Use a damp rag, using the All Purpose Cleaner. If the walls have semi-gloss paint, you can carefully try to remove any marks on them, but use the product sparingly. If the wall painting isn't glossy, the paint will be more easily damaged. Don't forget to clean all plug and switch plates too. Remove any pins, nails, and screws that you have put in the walls, and check your contract for what to do with the remaining holes. It is probably best to let the landlord or management company do the patching of holes and touch-up painting. Done incorrectly, could cost you more than your deposit!

If you are responsible for any outside areas, such as balconies, patios, porches, or yard, check what the contract says you are responsible for doing. If you sweep them tonight, and it is windy later, be sure to sweep them again on your last day if there are fallen leaves or other debris.

Move-out Minus **Seven Days**
OVEN and STOVE

OVEN: Remove and spray all racks, drip pans and broiler pans. Wipe out the inside of the oven with a damp rag and then spray it with the oven cleaner, following the instructions on the can. If you have a self-cleaning oven, just follow the instructions on the oven. When the program is over, wipe out the ashes inside with a barely damp rag. Do not use the oven after you have cleaned it. Next, clean beneath the pans, as well as all exterior surfaces of the oven, using the all-purpose cleaner.

STOVE: If you can live without your stove for the next three days clean it now. Otherwise, just clean the hood and perhaps the area underneath the burners. If any of the stove and hood surfaces are very greasy, ordinary dish washing detergent is the most effective way of removing the grease, followed by the all purpose cleaner. When you clean the stove top, be sure to clean burner rings carefully using the all-purpose cleaner. If you can tell the burner rings won't shine-up with cleaning, it is much simpler to replace them. The range hood filter cleans beautifully in the dishwasher.

This may be a good time to clean out the fireplace (if not used for heating). If the fireplace glass is covered with soot, you can use the oven cleaner to remove soot and black marks.

Move-out Minus **Six Days**
KITCHEN CABINETS

Before you start cleaning the kitchen cabinets and drawers, make sure they are perfectly empty of your personal belongings. This is a good time to not only clean the kitchen but to pack kitchen items at the same time. Starting with the top shelves and working your way

down to the lowest shelves and drawers, pack away everything you will not need for the next four days. As you empty a shelf or drawer wipe it down. Use a damp rag and a little ordinary dish washing detergent to cut the grease, or use the all-purpose cleaner if there are stubborn stains. Be sure to get rid of all crumbs. Once the shelves and drawers are cleaned, wipe the front of all cupboards and drawers. If their surfaces are shiny, you may want to use the Windex. When you're done, look at the cabinet fronts from different angles to make sure you removed all fingerprints, smudges and spots.

Move- out Minus **Five Days**

REFRIGERATOR AND OTHER APPLIANCES

If your kitchen came with a dishwasher, using a rag and all-purpose cleaner, clean its door front. You'd think that the inside of the dishwasher would always be clean but around the inside edges of the door, the latch and the hinges will also need cleaning.

If the unit came with a microwave oven, clean it inside and out, remembering the top and the grill below, using dishwashing detergent and/or all-purpose cleaner. Carefully clean and replace the glass tray.

Whether the refrigerator is yours or the landlord's, this is an excellent time to clean it – inside and out. Start by completely emptying it. Discard old food. Clean off bottles to make sure the shelves stay clean. Put loose fruits, vegetables and meat into plastic bags (such as the ones from the produce section of the store). This will keep the meat and produce drawers clean. Next, remove all internal shelves and drawers, wash and dry them carefully. Then put everything back into the refrigerator.

Next, clean the exterior of the refrigerator, using special care around the handle. Ask your landlord if they want you to clean behind and under the refrigerator. Although these areas will need cleaning, if you damage the linoleum or tile while moving this heavy appliance, repair or replacement costs will most likely be charged to you. Replace any burnt out appliance light bulbs. Check your move-out documentation to determine if you are to leave the fridge and freezer on or off.

Move-out Minus **Four Days**

THE REST OF THE KITCHEN

Use a small brush or an old toothbrush to remove grime from around sink edges, if it is a sunk sink. Clean the sink, sink plugs and lip of the garbage disposal with the all purpose cleaner. Get down on all fours and clean the kitchen floor, using Pine-Sol according to the directions on the bottle, making sure you get all stains. Do not overlook the corners and edges.

- Any cleaning not completed from the previous three days should be completed this day.
- Keep up with your packing.
- This may also be a good day to take your “good old used stuff” to a thrift store.

Move-out Minus **Three Days**
SHOWERS AND BATHTUBS

If you don't get the shower clean, no one will think you've done any cleaning at all. This is one of the nights, where you may need to really scrub hard. Clean all tiled bathroom surfaces and the shower, including the doors, tracks and shower walls, with the bathroom cleaner and a sponge. Use an old toothbrush to clean the tracks on sliding shower doors. You are going to need that cleanser with bleach to get the shower corners clean, and to remove any remaining mildew. **IMPORTANT:** Never use cleanser or anything abrasive for large areas or for smooth or glossy surfaces. And never, every use anything abrasive on acrylic showers or sinks as you will most likely cause permanent damage to these surfaces

Move-out Minus **Two Days**
BATHROOMS

Dust the lighting fixtures, replacing any broken bulbs if you haven't already done so. Clean all sink and shower fixtures with the all-purpose cleaner being careful so as not to scratch them. Wipe out the inside and outside of all cabinets. Don't forget to wipe clean any paper and towel bars, and clean any vents. Clean inside the toilet with the toilet bowl cleaner, and rinse thoroughly. Clean outside the toilet with the bathroom cleaner. Don't forget to clean underneath the bowl. Wash any mirrors with Windex and a lint free rag. Lastly, clean the bathroom floor, with the bathroom cleaner if it is tiled, use Pine-Sol if it is linoleum.

Move-out Day: Minus **One Day**
**STAYING ON SCHEDULE – LAST MINUTE
CONSIDERATIONS**

If you do not have the luxury of a moving company to do your packing and moving for you, you will most likely be doing your final packing today (and into the night) so cleaning will not be the highest priority.

IMPORTANT: If you are behind with any with the previous daily tasks, you will need to "step it up." Running OUT of time means you will not be able to do a thorough job of cleaning – this may cost you. If you have packed as much as you can and are current in your cleaning schedule, you are awesome!

Move-out Day
THE FINISHING TOUCHES

This is it – your last day – moving day! Everything gets packed up and moved out. Everything, that is, except your cleaning products, several clean rags, broom and vacuum.

Once the furniture is out, wipe down all baseboards, heat registers and electrical outlet covers. Then thoroughly vacuum all carpeted areas. When all boxes and belongings are completely out and you know the movers and other “helpers” will not be coming back to use the toilets and sinks, do your final clean in the bathrooms.

Next, walk through each room to make sure nothing has been overlooked or left behind. (Remember, you will be charged if the landlord has to haul off “debris” you leave behind.

With that finished, you will most likely end up in the final frontier – the kitchen. Do your final kitchen touch-up using a little Pine-Sol. If needed, wipe off the counters and stovetop again making sure you don’t leave any crumbs or streaks anywhere. Check the drawers and cupboards one last time. Sweep the floor.

Now is the time to remove everything from the house – all cleaning products, the broom, and vacuum – everything except a few dry, clean rags. Now, wet one of the clean rags with the Pin-Sol Solution. Ring it out so it is barely wet and set it aside. Clean the sink and faucet and dry with another soft clean rag. If the sink is stainless steel, drying with a soft rag is important as stainless steel tends to streak.

Lastly, with the clean Pin Sol rag you set aside in hand and while on your hands and knees work your way out the kitchen door wiping the floor as you go.

That’s it! Wow! You did it! Now doesn’t the whole place smell clean? Take one last look around. You can leave with a satisfied smile on your face and spring in your step.