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Change of address: A complete guide to moving across town, to another state or internationally

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Throughout 2020, the Charlotte metropolitan area saw a flurry of home sales. The region ended the year with close to 40,000 closed sales, more than 41,000 pending sales and close to 45,000 new listings. The result, which doesn't take into account renters who have relocated, is a lot of people moving within the area, into the area and out of the area. While Charlotte has been a hot market, the Covid-19 pandemic led to an overall increase in homes being bought and sold.



Regardless of the distance of the move, but particularly for interstate and international moves, it may be helpful to get the assistance of a relocation specialist.

On an individual level, making the decision to move takes a lot of forethought and consideration. But once that decision is made, the planning and work isn't over. Moving can be a stressful time, especially for people who haven't done it recently.

Common factors for all moves

The best place to start is with a checklist that will help itemize all the tasks involved in a move. This checklist, which suggests starting the tasks at least two months before the actual moving day, can be customized for each person's individual move.

“The most important aspect is to get as organized as possible before moving day and to have all of your components ready to go,” said Natalie Allen, relocation manager for HM Properties.

One important item that is sometimes overlooked is moving insurance. DIY movers need to check with their insurance company to see if a rental truck is covered on their vehicle policy. If not, they’ll want to take out both liability and limited damage waiver insurance to protect them from claims from a third party and damage to the truck. Moving companies typically offer a couple of options to protect belongings.

If it’s possible to choose the time of the move, fall and winter may be preferable. A lot of people relocate during the spring and summer, which affects the price and availability of rental trucks and moving companies. With fall and winter being a bit slower, it may be possible to find pricing discounts.

Moving within the local area

While there are many factors common for all moves, local ones feature a few unique elements.

One of the earliest decisions will involve how to complete the move — as either a DIY enterprise or by hiring movers. DIY movers need to make sure to line up people to help, schedule a truck and secure insurance.

A local move may offer the advantage of being able to take boxes, clothes and other belongings to the new house gradually, saving the heavy furniture and big items for the final moving day with a rental truck. “Taking your time and moving some of the smaller items [early] can help reduce the stress of moving,” said Allen. “It can be very tiring when you're rushing to get it all accomplished in one day.”

When people move locally, they sometimes forget to transfer their utilities, including electricity, gas, water, internet and phone. “It can take days to get all of your utilities turned on in your new home, so it's not something you want to leave to the last minute,” said Allen.

Crossing state lines

One of the most important aspects of planning a long-distance move is timing, making sure to arrive at the new house before the movers. It's especially important nothing is left behind, because it may be difficult to return to the old house. As a result, an out-of-state move tends to require more advance planning than local moves. "When you're moving interstate, you definitely want to plan ahead more and map out the timing and logistics of your move," said Allen. "People should begin the moving process as soon as they're aware they're going to be moving, but at least several months in advance of a local move."

Special factors to consider for an interstate move are the need for a short- or long-term rental, storage facilities and how the family will be transported. People moving for a job may need to be in their new location before the new house is available. This may require them to find a rental for a period of time.

Rather than moving everything into the rental, it may be better to put some items in storage. The location of the storage facility — whether it is near the new home or the rental — may change the way belongings are packed. In addition to marking which boxes go in which rooms, boxes that are going into storage also need to be marked and should be put on the truck either first or last, depending on where the truck will stop first.

Transportation for family members must also be considered carefully. For a move of several hundred or thousands of miles, is the family going to drive or fly? Will some of the family fly while someone else drives the car? Flying may involve staying in a hotel for a few days until the moving truck arrives and perhaps even purchasing a new car.

"DIY movers may want to get their truck packed up a few days in advance of the actual move day," said Allen. "It may be difficult and stressful to load the truck and move all in one day, so they may incur a bit more of a cost [for the truck rental]."

Leaving the country

Moving out of the U.S. is the most complex move. Unless the destination is Canada or Mexico, belongings will be transported on a cargo ship while the family will have to fly. Starting the planning

process early is key. “There are a lot of moving parts with an international move,” said Allen. “People may want to start nine months or a year before the move to get everything organized.”

Shipping belongings internationally is expensive, so it’s important to make critical decisions on what to move and what to leave behind. If the move is temporary, it may save money to put a lot of furniture in storage. If it’s a permanent move, it may be easier to sell furniture and purchase new pieces abroad.

Additionally, some countries limit what can be brought in. “Some examples include firearms, ammunition, alcohol and certain types of wood in your furniture, which could upset the ecosystem,” said Allen. “This can be researched with a general internet search, by contacting the embassy or talking to your international moving company.”

It may also be necessary to research electronics compatibility. In the U.S., for example, outlets are for 110-volt devices. In many other countries, electrical outlets accommodate 220-volt devices. While it may be possible to purchase adapters for the new country, some items may need to be replaced entirely.

A trip to another country involves a stop at customs upon entry. “You want to be prepared for customs and have all of your identification paperwork, including your driver's license and passport, along with paperwork for your employment and the shipping of your belongings,” said Allen. “You also need to be prepared to fill out the paperwork for the country you’re entering and potentially pay taxes on your belongings.”

Getting assistance for the move

Regardless of the distance of the move, but particularly for interstate and international moves, it may be helpful to get the assistance of a relocation specialist. While companies paying for an employee transfer may hire a specialist for their employee, people can hire the services of a specialist on their own.

Relocation specialists can help find realtors in the new city; secure temporary housing; find movers, local utility companies, schools and recreation options; and assist in other facets of the moving process. A relocation service may be essential for an international

move. "A relocation specialist can be a good partner for you during a move and can help minimize the stress, amount of effort, leg work and research you may do on your own," said Allen.

Pets should not be an afterthought

Having pets adds another layer of challenges to the moving checklist. On the actual moving day, it may be best to have a friend keep your pets or even board them for the day. The chaos of moving day can be confusing and unnerving to pets, and some pets may run off if arrangements haven't been made for their care that day.

When it's time to go to the new house, driving is the best option with pets. However, some pets may need motion sickness or anxiety medication. If flying, contact the airline to learn about their pet policies. Depending on the size of the pet, it may be possible to have them in the main cabin.

Just like people, pets should have a travel bag. Theirs would contain food for several days, treats, medication, toys, litter box and even their bed.

It's important to research the laws of the new state or country to see what vaccinations may be needed and schedule an appointment with the current vet as soon as possible. At that time, get an extra prescription for any medications so an emergency trip to an unknown vet in the new location won't be needed.

In addition to potential vaccinations, when moving internationally, research to see if the new country has any breed restrictions, whether a pet needs to be micro-chipped and about their quarantine regulations. "For countries with quarantines, it could be fewer than 10 days all the way up to the four weeks required by Iceland," said Allen.

"When moving with pets, you want to make their transition as smooth and stress-free as possible," said Allen.

While moving to a new home can be a lot of work, advance planning for all the tasks and details can help make for a less stressful experience.

See available real estate in the Charlotte market at hmproperties.com.

HM Properties is a full-service residential real estate company serving the Charlotte region, including upstate South Carolina. The agency also has an in-house relocation department that manages individual and corporate moves. The company was founded in 2006 and now has three offices in the Charlotte region.