INFORMATION PAPER ON PCS MOVE

CLAIMS ADVICE FOR PCS MOVES

Moving is something all soldiers are familiar with. Unfortunately, moves often result in loss and damage of the items being shipped. Whether it is a scratch on a family heirloom, or a box of your favorite compact disks that disappears during the move, such losses can be traumatic.

The military claims system is designed to help soldiers recover for such losses. It is also designed to ensure that the carrier responsible for the loss and damage is held accountable. This article will explain the military claims system and explain ways you can ensure fair compensation for any loss and damage you suffer during a PCS move.

Before the Move

The best way to ensure you will be compensated for loss and damage during a move is to take a few precautions before the move. This is the best time to document what you own and to ensure that you have the insurance coverage that you need.

The first thing to consider is whether you need additional insurance protection. You can either purchase your own insurance or, for moves within the continental United States, you can buy additional insurance protection through the transportation office. If you do not purchase insurance, the Army claims office can only pay the depreciated replacement or repair cost of your lost and damaged items. This is because the relevant claims statute only allows payment for current market value and not full replacement cost. In addition, the claims office has certain maximum amounts payable for specific items; for example, the maximum for stereo equipment is $1,000 per item and $4,000 per shipment. If you need more protection, you should consider buying insurance.

Most private insurance contracts will reimburse you only for items lost or destroyed during shipment; they usually will not cover damaged items (items which can be economically repaired). Some insurance companies provide "full replacement" cost protection; this means that if your ten year old television is destroyed they will pay to replace it with a comparable new television. Each insurance policy is different; it is important to find out if the coverage satisfies your needs before your move.

For moves within the continental United States you can also arrange for two types of insurance through the transportation office. "Option 1" or "higher increased released value" insurance will provide you with a greater dollar amount of protection for individual items. For example, if you purchase "Option 1" insurance and your stereo is destroyed, the carrier will pay you the depreciated value of your stereo up to the full amount the protection you purchased, regardless of the $1,000 maximum amount allowable for stereo items. "Option 2" or "full replacement protection" entitles you to the

full undepreciated value of your lost and destroyed items. For example, if you purchased "Option 2" insurance and your stereo was destroyed, the carrier should pay you the cost of a comparable new stereo. If your stereo is merely damaged, however, the carrier has the option of repairing it. Both "Option 1" and "Option 2" insurance are purchased from the carrier, so your payment will ultimately come from the carrier. Your local transportation office or claims office can explain the procedures for filing an insurance claim against the carrier.

Documenting what you own is perhaps the most important thing to do before your move. Ensure that you save receipts, bills, appraisals, high value item inventories, and other proof of ownership. These important documents should never be shipped with your household goods. Ship them separately or, better yet, hand-carry them. This way, if your entire shipment is lost, your proof of ownership will not be lost as well.

An excellent way to document what you own is to take pictures or videotape of the items in your house immediately before the move. If you have an extensive compact disk collection, or a number of Hummel or Lladro figurines, this is an excellent way of demonstrating the extent of your collection. Ensure that you videotape the open jewel covers of your compact disks, showing the disks inside. Pictures and videotapes have an added benefit; not only will they show what you own, but they will also demonstrate the condition of your items. If the movers scratch your dining room table, you will have a much easier time proving that the scratch occurred during the move if you have a picture of the table taken immediately before the move. Carry the photos and videotapes with you; do not ship them.

During the Move

When the packers arrive to pick-up your household goods, you should be ready for them. You should have already decided what items you want the movers to pack and what items you will hand-carry to your new assignment. It is critical to lock items you plan to hand-carry in a separate room or in your car, where they are not accessible to the movers.

It is best to hand-carry small, valuable items such as jewelry, rather than to allow the movers to pack them. If you decide to have the movers pack your jewelry, ensure that **each** item is listed **separately** on the inventory. **Cash, coin collections**, and similar items should never be packed; you **will not be paid** for these items if they are lost. As mentioned above, receipts and similar proof of ownership should either be hand-carried or, at a minimum, shipped separately.

When the movers have completed packing up your household goods and loading them onto the truck, they will present you with an inventory of all of your belongings. You should check this document carefully to ensure that it is accurate. Each line item of the inventory will contain a description of what it is (such as "3.0 cubic foot carton" or "chair"). For items of furniture, preexisting damage will be listed using a code found at the top or bottom of the form (for example "sc, ch - 6, 8, 9" means that the legs and right

side of your chair are scratched and chipped). Examine the preexisting damages carefully; if the movers have exaggerated the amount of preexisting damages, you should state your disagreement directly on the inventory, in the "remarks" section directly above your signature. Do not argue with the movers; simply list your disagreement on the form.

When the movers deliver your household goods, make sure that they have delivered everything. Have a copy of the inventory handy and check off the numbers of items when the movers bring them into your new home.

If you notice that any items are missing or damaged, note this on the pink form (DD Form 1840), which the movers will give you. Do not leave this form blank if you have missing or damaged items; the government uses this form later to evaluate whether the carrier did a good job. There is no need to unpack all of your items at this time; you can note additional missing and damaged items later on the reverse side of the pink form (the reverse side is the DD Form 1840R).

After the Move

Unlike most civilian moves, where loss and damage must be noted immediately after delivery, soldiers have 70 days to notify the local claims office of loss and damage. This means that after your household goods have been delivered, you have 70 days to unpack them and note any loss and damage on the reverse side of the pink form (the DD Form 1840R). Thoroughly inspect your items: turn on electrical items to ensure they still operate; open the jewel covers of your compact disks to ensure the disks are still there; check your figurines to ensure they are not chipped. At this point it is sufficient to state the general nature of the damage, such as "stereo - does not work." There is no need to get a repair estimate at this stage.

You must turn in the reverse side of the pink form (the DD Form 1840R) to your nearest Army claims office within 70 days of the delivery of your household goods. Failure to do so will make it impossible for the claims office to collect from the carrier responsible for your loss. As a result, the claims office invariably will not pay you for any items that you failed to report within 70 days.

When you turn in your DD Form 1840R, the claims office will provide you with forms and information on filing your claim. At this point you will need to get repair estimates and other documentation to substantiate the amount of your loss. You have two years from the date of the **original delivery** (not from the date you turned in your DD Form 1840R) to file a claim. If you are late in filing your claim the government will not be able to pay you anything.

The Army claims system is designed to help you. However, you also have a responsibility to protect yourself. If you keep proper records of what you own and promptly document damages that occur during the move, you should be able to recover the fair value of your loss. If you have questions, your local transportation office and local claims office can provide the answers.