IN ORDER TO AVOID DISPUTES OVER YOUR SECURITY DEPOSIT, California law requires you to leave the apartment in the exact same condition it was in when you moved in, except for normal wear and tear (Civil Code Section 1950.5). After you move out, the best way to document that you have cleaned thoroughly is to schedule a Move-Out Video with CHO. Non-biased videotaping protects all parties when reconciling deposits.

Before You Start

Before you start, obtain a list of the property provider’s expectations concerning cleaning, often listed in your move-out packet. Look over the lease to see if there are any specific requirements.

Kitchen

☐ **Stove & Oven:** Apply an oven-cleaner the night before you clean. Use a sponge or scouring pad to clean the inside of the oven. Lift up the stove top area and clean around the burners and the drip pans underneath. Clean the stove hood, fan, screen, and light covers.

☐ **Refrigerator:** Defrost and clean thoroughly (including defrost tray) with water and a mild cleanser. Keep an eye on the refrigerator during the defrosting to prevent the defrost tray from overflowing. Remember to clean behind, under and on top of refrigerator as well as the grill below the refrigerator door.

☐ **Counters & Cabinets:** Empty and scrub clean of all food build-up, water spots, grease, etc.

Bathroom

☐ **Bathtub, Showers & Fixtures:** Scrub with cleaner. Areas should be free of mildew and soap scum. Shower rod, towel racks, mirror and toilet-paper holder should be clean and secure.

☐ **Toilet Bowls:** Clean inside, under rim, and outside – base and tank included.

General Areas

☐ **Windows:** Clean inside and out with window cleaner. Vacuum and wipe window tracks and windowsill areas. Dust must be removed from all blinds and drapes.

☐ **Floors:** Sweep and mop with an appropriate cleaner.

☐ **Patios & Balconies:** Sweep clean and remove all personal belongings and trash. Wipe down all spills. Hauling fees may be charged to the tenants if items are left behind.

☐ **Walls & Ceilings:** Dirt and smudge marks must be removed from the walls, doors, light-switch plates, and surrounding areas. Remove any cobwebs, spots, mold, or mildew.

☐ **Heating/Air Conditioning:** Fixtures and filters should be clean.

☐ **Light Bulbs/Smoke Detectors:** Replace all burned-out light bulbs and dead batteries in smoke detectors.

☐ **Closets, Garage & Storage Areas:** Remove all personal items. Shelves should be dust-free and floors should be clean.

☐ **Common Areas:** These areas should be cleared of debris and dirt. See your move-out packet or call your property provider for information regarding how you may be billed for hauling and pressure washing, even if it is your neighbors’ mess.

☐ **Furnishings:** Leave them intact, clean, and without damage.

Carpets

Some leases state that steam cleaning is required before move-out. Most property providers advise that you can use any cleaning company you wish, but if the work is not of high quality, the carpets may need to be redone at your expense. Choose a licensed and bonded company that guarantees their work. Carpets must be cleaned at least 24 hours prior...
to move out so that they are dry enough to walk on. If carpets are wet at your move out inspection time, some property providers will reschedule your move-out appointment and you may be charged additional rent for each day until they come back.

In all cases, carpets must be well vacuumed. Before vacuuming, carefully sweep around the edges of the carpet, in corners and adjacent to the wall, on stairs, and around the edges of furniture that can’t be easily moved to clear the dirt so the vacuum can reach it.

**Cleaning Companies**

It is strongly recommended that you hire professional cleaning companies to clean your apartment and carpets after you have moved out. This is the best way to avoid conflicts over your security deposit. Be forewarned that you should clean your apartment as thoroughly as possible beforehand, because cleaning companies charge based on the amount of cleaning that they have to do. If you choose to do the cleaning yourselves, it’s best to have a cleaning company perform a “spot clean” to ensure that everything is immaculate.

Get recommendations from your property provider on which cleaning and carpet cleaning companies to use. Obtain estimates from these companies and set up cleaning appointments in advance. Make sure that the companies you use are licensed and bonded and guarantee their work (ask for a copy of their license), meaning that they will come back and finish the job if your property provider is not satisfied. After the cleaning, inform your property provider of the companies that you chose, in the event that follow-up is necessary, and give him/her copies of your receipts.

---

**Initial Move-Out Inspection**

According to California Civil Code Section 1950.5(f)(1): Within a reasonable time after notification of either party’s intention to terminate the tenancy, or before the end of the lease term, the property provider shall notify the tenant in writing of his or her option to request an initial inspection and of his or her right to be present at the inspection. If the tenant does not request an initial inspection after receiving notice, the landlord is not required to perform the inspection.

The goal of the initial inspection is for the property provider to identify defects or conditions that justify deductions from the tenant’s deposit. This gives the tenant the opportunity to do the identified cleaning or repairs in order to avoid deductions from the security deposit. The inspection cannot take place more than two weeks before the end of the tenancy. The inspection should be scheduled to give tenant ample time to perform repairs or cleaning identified.

When the tenant requests an initial inspection, the property provider and the tenant must try to agree on a mutually convenient date and time for the inspection. Unless the tenant no longer wants the inspection or waives their right to the notice requirement, a landlord is required to give the tenant at least 48 hours’ advance written notice of the date and time of the inspection whether or not the parties have agreed to a date and time. The property provider may perform the inspection if the tenant is not present, unless the tenant has previously withdrawn the request for inspection.

Based on the inspection, the property provider must prepare an itemized statement of repairs or cleaning that they believe the tenant should perform in order to avoid deductions from the security deposit. The property provider must leave the itemized statement with the tenant or inside the unit if the tenant is not present. The property provider must also provide a copy of the sections of California’s security deposit statute that list lawful uses of a tenants’ security deposits.

The property provider may perform a final inspection after the tenant has moved out of the rental and can deduct from the tenant’s security deposit to repair a defect or correct a condition: 1) that was identified in the inspection statement and not repaired or corrected by tenant; 2) that occurred after the initial inspection; 3) that was not identified during the initial inspection due to the presence of the tenant’s possessions.