

Real Estate Program Manual

Chapter Five: Relocation

5.1 GENERAL RELOCATION REQUIREMENTS

Relocation information presented by agents in the field should be in sufficient detail to explain the relocation situation to each relocatee on affected projects adequately, whether the information is presented in written format or orally at the interviews.

5.1.1 Public Information Meetings

To assure the public has adequate knowledge of the relocation program, WisDOT shall present the following information and provide opportunity for discussion of relocation services and benefits at public information meetings. Information shall include:

- 1. A general description of relocation services and payments.
- 2. A statement that a person who moves prematurely may jeopardize relocation entitlements.
- 3. Identification of project boundaries and an estimate of the number of residential and non-residential properties to be acquired.
- 4. Information that all people to be displaced will be informed about relocation program through procedures as outlined in this chapter at time of initial interview for the Acquisition Stage Relocation Plan (RE2238) and the initiation of negotiations.
- 5. Information that WisDOT prepares a relocation plan prior to acquisition and those persons to be affected shall be contacted to obtain information to prepare the relocation plan.
- 6. Provide the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) relocation rights information: residential and business.
- 7. Provide name, address, email and phone number of an agency representative available for further information on acquisition and relocation assistance matters.
- 8. A statement that sufficient time to relocate will be provided.

5.1.2 Notice of Relocation Eligibility

Eligibility for relocation assistance will begin on the date of initiation of negotiations for the occupied property. When this occurs, WisDOT shall promptly notify all occupants in writing of their eligibility for the applicable relocation assistance. Promptly is defined as meaning "as soon as possible," preferably within seven to ten calendar days.

5.1.3 Written Notice and Information

WisDOT shall provide displaced persons and property owners with the following written notices and relocation information as specified in this section in order to ensure that each displacee is fully informed of the benefits and services available.

5.1.3.1 Assurance of Occupancy and 90 Day Notice to Vacate

For a WisDOT right of way project that results in a displacement, a firm date to vacate the property should be established prior to the start of any acquisition and relocation activities.

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WisDOT must review this date with property owners and provide timely information on any date adjustments. All relocatees must be notified in writing as soon as possible of any adjustments.

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Federal Uniform Act provisions:

Assurance of occupancy - WisDOT must provide a 90 day assurance of occupancy ("assurance") for all residential and non-residential relocations under the federal Uniform Act (49 CFR Part 24.203). This assurance provides relocatees a guarantee that they will have a minimum of 90 days before being required to move from the property to be acquired. This assurance may start the actual timeline of 90 days to vacate the premises or it may indicate a specific date in the future when the 90 days will start, depending on the project timeline.

As part of the relocation packet provided to relocatees at or within seven (7) days of the initiation of negotiations, the assurance must be incorporated into the "notice of relocation eligibility" letter given to each relocatee. The relocation packet includes the assurance incorporated into the notice of relocation of eligibility letter/initiation of negotiations letter. See REPM/5.1.3.3 for further information. In order for the 90 day period to commence, WisDOT must provide three comparable properties that meet the Uniform Act criteria found in 49 CFR Part 24.204 and Adm 92. While the Uniform Act allows for a minimum of one comparable is provided, three comparable properties are necessary to ensure multiple available properties could be considered a comparable. The assurance is provided to persons who:

- are in lawful occupancy;
- are required to vacate their premises because of the proposed highway construction; and,
- have personal property located on the acquired property.

The assurance must state that the relocatee will receive a notice to vacate, specifying the actual date the relocatee must vacate the premises. The assurance given to a displacee at the initiation of negotiations is not considered a notice to vacate.

Wisconsin Statutes and Administrative Code provisions:

<u>90 day notice to vacate</u> - Wisconsin Statutes, <u>s. 32.05(8)</u> and <u>Adm 92.06</u> require a notice to relocatees at least 90 days prior to the date of vacation. Wisconsin Statutes <u>s. 32.05(8)(b)</u> states:

"...No person occupying real property may be required to move from a dwelling or move his or her business or farm without at least 90 days' written notice of the intended vacation date from the condemnor."

And, Adm 92.06(6)(b) states:

"An agency may not require an occupant of property acquired by an agency to move without at least 90 day written notice of an intended vacation date."

The 90 day notice to vacate ("notice to vacate") letter must provide a specific date for occupants to vacate the property. The notice to vacate is especially important if the relocatee may not surrender occupancy of the property in a timely manner or when WisDOT will need to record an Award of Damages to transfer ownership of the property. A region must provide a notice to vacate to the displacee(s) as soon as the region is aware of the

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Coordinating with BTS-RE statewide relocation facilitator - If facing a difficult relocation, which may lead to a potential for an Award of Damages and/or a Writ of Assistance (eviction), the regional agent should coordinate with the statewide relocation facilitator to review the relocation and steps anticipated to obtain possession of the property. This preparation is prior to legal involvement with the Wisconsin Department of Justice. This coordination is intended to ensure that state and federal requirements have been met. These requirements include:

- All proper notices and written information have been provided to the relocatees as required under the Uniform Act; Wis. Stats. <u>Chapter 32</u> and <u>Adm 92</u>.
- Relocatees have been given adequate time to relocate.
- WisDOT has provided at least one comparable property to relocatees.
- WisDOT has sufficiently addressed the needs of the relocatees.

Award of damages and writ of assistance - REPM/Section 3.9 describes the condemnation process for highway projects, including: 1) Jurisdictional Offer (s. 32.05(3) and (4) Wis. Stats.; 2) Award of Damages and Payment (s. 32.05(7), Wis. Stats.); and, 3) Writ of Assistance (s. 32.05(8), Wis. Stats.). When WisDOT is unable to negotiate the purchase of a property with an owner, a Jurisdictional Offer (JO) (RE1786) is prepared. The notice provides a 20-day period for acceptance by the owner. If the JO expires or is rejected, an Award of Damages payment may be prepared by a region. When WisDOT is unable to gain timely possession of a property, WisDOT may apply to the circuit court for a Writ of Assistance (eviction). The preparation of the Writ of Assistance occurs through the coordination of WisDOT and the Wisconsin Department of Justice.

When to issue a 90 day notice to vacate - If either an Award of Damages or a Writ of Assistance, or both, will be necessary to fully secure possession of the acquired parcel, the 90 day notice to vacate, issued on the date the Award of Damages is recorded, firmly establishes the vacancy date. [Example: A property must be vacated by July 1. The Award of Damages must be issued a minimum of 90 days prior to this date on April 1. A JO was issued 20 days prior on March 11. If the Award is recorded on April 1, WisDOT can send the 90 day notice to vacate on that date. The 30 day rent-free period will apply after the Award is recorded starting on the 1st or 15th day of the month.] Planning ahead and working back from the established vacancy date is important and should take place as early as possible. If a project letting date is moved and postpones the need for parcel clearance, the notice to vacate may be extended at the discretion of the region.

When a Writ of Assistance is obtained, WisDOT must follow the requirements under <u>s. 32.05(8)(b)</u>, Wis. Stats.:

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"...No person occupying real property may be required to move from a dwelling or move his or her business or farm without at least 90 days' written notice of the intended vacation date from the condemnor. The displaced person shall have rent-free occupancy of the acquired property for a period of 30 days, commencing with the next 1st or 15th

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day of the month after title vests in the condemnor, whichever is sooner. Any person occupying the property after the date that title vests in the condemnor is liable to the condemnor for all waste committed or allowed by the occupant on the lands condemned during the occupancy..."

If a notice to vacate is issued prior to the recording of the Award of Damages, the date of vacancy must comply with the procedures to issue an Award of Damages and filing a Writ of Assistance and include the minimum of 30 days, rent-free period as specified above. When a notice to vacate is issued at the time of the recording of the Award of Damages, unless possession is otherwise negotiated, the Writ of Assistance should be undertaken at the end of 90 days. When a notice to vacate is issued 60 days prior to the recording of the Award of Damages, a Writ of Assistance procedure should not commence until the end of the 30-day, rent-free period under the above provision in s. 32.05(8)(b), Wis. Stats.

30 day notice to vacate - Wisconsin Statutes s. 32.05(8)(b), specifies the 30 day rent-free period shall begin on the next 1st or 15th of the month after the closing date or when an Award of Damages has been recorded (e.g., if closing is May 10; free rental period begins May 15). [Example: WisDOT informs a residential property relocatee that the property must be vacated by July 1. An Award of Damages is recorded in the Register of Deeds on May 28 (a JO was sent May 1).] The 90 Day Notice to Vacate can be issued 60 days prior to recording of the Award of Damages on March 28, with a vacancy date of July 1. The relocatee's 30 day rent-free period begins June 1. WisDOT would send the 30 Day Notice to Vacate on June 1, the same day the free rent period begins.

Lease agreement and rent charged - The region will present a lease agreement to the relocatee at the time of the recording of the Award of Damages, which provides the 30 day rent-free period. The lease will provide language that the relocatee is responsible for paying rent for the remainder of the time they remain in occupancy up to 60 days maximum. The amount of rent WisDOT may charge to a relocatee is established by using an economic rent calculation or existing and verifiable, current rental rates, whichever is less; or, in the case of an acquired residential dwelling, one-half of one-percent (1/2 of 1%) of the purchase price is used. A relocatee should be encouraged to vacate the parcel as soon as possible after the Award of Damages has been recorded. WisDOT does not have to undertake a Writ of Assistance process if the relocatee vacates before the designated vacancy date. If the relocatee vacates prior to or at the end of the 30 day rent-free period, no rent is due.

<u>Vacancy inspection</u> - Regional staff or the relocation consultant serving on behalf of WisDOT is personally required to conduct a vacancy inspection to verify that all personal property has been removed from the property. The visual inspection and completed Vacancy Notice (RE1783) must be provided in relocation section of READS.

No move payments issued until - 1) WisDOT is notified the premise is vacant; 2) the regional relocation agent has conducted an inspection verifying the premise is vacant; 3) Vacancy Notice (RE1783) is completed, signed and in READS; and, 4) no further actions are necessary.

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<u>Documentation</u> - Signed copies of all original notices (including any revised notices for changes to the date of vacancy); signed lease agreements; and, signed vacancy inspections must be documented in the relocation case file, Relocation Assistance Diary (RE1043); and, all appropriate and related materials are complete in READS.

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5.1.3.2 Initial Contact

WisDOT shall provide written notice at the time of initial contact, during the interview for the Acquisition Stage Relocation Plan (RE2238) to obtain information necessary for preparation of the relocation plan:

- 1. A tenant or an owner-occupant of a property shall receive a letter or other general written information, which describes:
 - Date acquisition is expected to begin.
 - Nature of proposed project.
 - Relocation assistance and benefits in summary.
 - Warning against premature moves that may jeopardize relocation entitlements.
 - WisDOT contact (name, address, email and phone of agency representative).
- 2. An owner of rental property shall receive a statement, which:
 - Advises if tenant(s) moves before acquisition, an owner may qualify for a rent loss payment.
 - Cautions owner against eviction of tenants before acquisition.
 - Explains nature of proposed project.
 - Explains that owner of property may be eligible for re-establishment expenses.
 - Explains that tenants are being advised not to move prematurely.
 - Informs owner that tenants are being contacted to obtain information to prepare plan.
- 3. This information must be furnished at the time of initial contact unless already provided along with the written notice of the initial project letters. The current document must be downloaded electronically from the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) / Relocation Assistance website.
 - A tenant or an owner-occupant of a residential property will receive information entitled "Wisconsin Relocation Rights Residential" for residential occupants.
 - Tenant or owner occupant of a business or farm property will receive information entitled "Wisconsin Relocation Rights - <u>Business</u>, <u>Farm and Non-Profit</u>" for business or farm occupants.

5.1.3.3 Initiation of Negotiations

The following written documents and letters shall be furnished to each relocatee (person) at the time of the initiation of negotiations. WisDOT staff and/or consultants serving as relocation agents on behalf of WisDOT will develop a written packet/folder to provide each relocatee with these items (whether residential or business):

- Contact information (i.e., name, address, email and phone of WisDOT staff).
- Claim forms.
- Computations Replacement Housing Payment-Owner (RE1943); Replacement Housing Payment-Tenant (RE1948), includes comparison chart and pictures.

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 Relocation information sheets – business owner (RE1039bo); business tenant (RE1039bt); farm owner (RE1039fo); farm tenant (RE1039ft); residential owner (RE1039ro); and, residential tenant (RE1039rt).

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- Relocation Payments Summary/Residential (RE1679R); Relocation Payments Summary Business/Farm/Non-Profit (RE1679B).
- Self-addressed return envelope(s).
- Vacancy Notice (RE1783) to be completed by relocatee.
- Wisconsin Department of Administration relocation rights information: <u>residential</u>, <u>business</u>.
- Relocation Notice of Eligibility (initiation of negotiation) letter.

5.1.3.4 Legal Residency Certification and Relocation Payment Calculations

Each person seeking relocation payments or relocation advisory assistance under the federal Uniform Act must certify U.S. residency status as a condition of eligibility (see FHWA website: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/real estate/uniform act/index.cfm) / Illegal Aliens and the Uniform Act. The certification shall indicate:

- 1. For an individual, that he/she is either a citizen or national of the United States, or an alien who is lawfully present in the United States.
- 2. For a household, that each member is either a citizen or national of the United States, or an alien who is lawfully present in the United States. The certification may be made by the head of the household on behalf of other family members.
- 3. For an unincorporated business, farm, or nonprofit organization, that each owner is either a citizen or national of the United States, or an alien who is lawfully present in the United States. The certification may be made by the principal owner, manager or operating officer on behalf of other persons with an ownership interest.
- 4. For an incorporated business, farm, or nonprofit organization, that the corporation is authorized to conduct business within the United States.

The Certification of Legal Residency (RE1031), as provided by WisDOT, must be completed and signed by each person seeking relocation payments. Regional staff must include the completed form in the property file and in READS. The completed certification must be included as part of the claim for relocation payments.

Relocation payments and relocation advisory assistance will not be provided to a person who has not provided the certification described in this section; or who has been determined to be not lawfully present in the United States, unless a person can demonstrate to WisDOT's satisfaction, that the denial of relocation benefits will result in an "exceptional and extremely unusual hardship" to a person's spouse, parent, or child who is a citizen of the United States, or is an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States. "Exceptional and extremely unusual hardship" to a spouse, parent, or child of the person not lawfully present in the United States means that the denial of relocation payments and advisory assistance to the person will directly result in:

- A significant and demonstrable adverse impact on the health or safety of the person's spouse, parent, or child;
- A significant and demonstrable adverse impact on the continued existence of the family unit of which the person's spouse, parent, or child is a member; or,
- Any other impact that WisDOT determines will have a significant and demonstrable adverse impact on a person's spouse, parent, or child.

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For cases in which an "exceptional and extremely unusual hardship" may be considered, regional staff must consult with the statewide relocation facilitator for approval of hardship cases.

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<u>Non-discrimination</u> - Any review by WisDOT of the certifications shall be conducted in a nondiscriminatory fashion. WisDOT will apply the standard of review to all certifications it receives, except that standards may be revised periodically.

WisDOT Review of Certification of Legal Residency:

For each residential and non-residential relocation, the regional Real Estate (RE) relocation agent will explain the residency status certification required under the federal Uniform Act. The relocation agent should introduce the requirement during the initial interview process. At the initiation of negotiations, the relocation agent should request and receive a signed copy of the Certification of Legal Residency (RE1031). WisDOT will consider the signed certification form provided by a person to be valid, unless WisDOT determines it is invalid based on a review of certification documentation or other information that WisDOT considers reliable and appropriate. If, based on a review of documentation or other credible evidence, WisDOT has reason to believe that a person's certification is invalid [Example: A document reviewed does not on its face reasonably appear to be genuine] and that, as a result, a person may be an alien not lawfully present in the U.S., regional staff need to obtain this information:

- Regional staff should request and review evidence of U.S. citizenship or nationality from such person. [Examples of documentation may include a birth certificate or U.S.-issued Green Card.] The relocation agent will review the authenticity of the document provided and identify the review in the Relocation Assistance Diary (RE1043). No copies should be retained by WisDOT.
- 2. If considered necessary, regional staff will verify the accuracy of such evidence with the issuer. Verification of the person's lawful status can be obtained from the local Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS). A list of local BCIS offices is available at http://www.uscis.gov, and then to find a USCIS office. Any request for BCIS verification should include the person's(s) full name, date of birth, and a copy of the person's citizenship documentation.
- 3. If regional staff has a concern about validity of the person's certification, staff must contact the statewide relocation facilitator for further consultation and determination.

<u>Refusals</u> - A refusal to sign the Certification of Legal Residency form by the relocatee will be regarded as non-certified and documented within the Relocation Assistance Diary (RE1043). Any refusals to certify legal residency must be relayed to the statewide relocation facilitator immediately and identified in the Relocation Assistance Diary (RE1043) in READS.

Computing relocation benefits and payments:

In computing relocation payments, if any member(s) of a household (tenants/owners) or owner(s) of an unincorporated business, farm, or nonprofit organization is (are) determined to be ineligible because of a failure to be legally present in the United States, no relocation payments may be made.

<u>Households</u> - Any payment(s) for such household, which would otherwise be eligible, are computed based on the number of eligible household members. [Example: A four person,

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owner-occupied household has two undocumented residents. The household also has two children who are U.S. citizens based on documentation of state-issued birth certificates. Moving expenses and replacement housing payments would be provided at 50 percent of the calculated totals to provide benefits to the two household members that are U.S. citizens.]

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Determining number of rooms for comparable housing - The number of bedrooms under the decent, safe and sanitary (DSS) requirements applies only to legal residents of the U.S. However, its application is dependent on the circumstances of the members of a household. If there are four non-legal status adults and three children that are U.S. citizens being relocated from a three-bedroom apartment rental, the requirement is to ensure three rooms for the three legal residents (e.g., children that are U.S. citizens). The regional relocation agent must consider if providing a three-bedroom apartment will create exceptional harm to the children, spouse or family unit. Regional staff will consult the statewide relocation facilitator to discuss the number of bedrooms calculated if an exceptional harm exception is under consideration.

<u>Unincorporated business</u> (sole proprietorships, partnerships, farms, non-profits) - Any payment(s) for an unincorporated business, farm or nonprofit organization, which would otherwise be eligible, are computed based on the ratio of ownership between eligible and ineligible owners for moving payments and business reestablishment expenses.

<u>Corporation</u> - Federal law considers a legal person established under state laws, need only certify that it is authorized to conduct business in the U.S. All payments are calculated using eligibility provisions.

5.1.3.5 Written Notice of Claim Denial

WisDOT shall promptly notify a claimant in writing of a determination of claim denial with this information included in the letter:

- Basis for determination.
- How person may modify or further document claim or file an appeal, when an agency denies a claim or does not approve full amount.

5.1.3.6 Manner of Notice

WisDOT shall make a diligent effort to contact a person, and to provide notices as specified in this section; and, will use plain written language and include the name, email and phone of contact person; and, will also provide appropriate translation and counseling for any person(s) who is to be displaced who may be unable to read or understand such notice.

WisDOT shall give a person written notice by:

- Certified or registered first-class mail, with a return receipt requested/receipt documented.
- Personal service.

5.1.3.7 Notice of Intent to Acquire

In special circumstances, WisDOT may establish eligibility for relocation benefits to occupants prior to the initiation of negotiations for the parcel by issuing the intent to acquire

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notice. When the intent to acquire notice is issued, for the purposes of this chapter, the date of initiation of negotiations for the parcel is considered the date of such notice. This notice is not issued prior to the Relocation Order (RE1708) for the project or prior to authorization for acquisition of individual parcels in the case of a protective purchase or a hardship acquisition. The notice advises occupants of this information:

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- Anticipated date of actual initiation of negotiations.
- Any occupant contemplating moving should, to ensure eligibility for moving and replacement housing and rent supplements, notify department before moving.
- Area of their eligibility for and requirements to receive moving and replacement housing and rent supplement payments.
- How additional information pertaining to relocation assistance payments, benefits and services can be obtained.

5.1.3.8 Notice of Appeal Rights

All displaced persons shall be furnished a written notice of their right to appeal as provided in REPM/Sub-Section 5.3.6, which contains the procedure for making an appeal. Such notice, which is contained in the relocation information, is given to the relocatee at the time of the initiation of negotiations.

5.1.4 Deductions from Relocation Payments

These conditions apply to deductions from relocation payments:

- No portion of a relocation payment may be withheld by WisDOT to make payment to any other creditor.
- Regional RE management may deduct unpaid rent from relocation move payments.

5.1.5 Eviction Policy

WisDOT may evict a person as a last resort after attempts to correct the situation have failed; however, eviction does not affect the eligibility of a person for relocation benefits. When necessary, WisDOT shall assist the tenant displacee (prior to the initiation of negotiations) to prevent eviction by an owner. WisDOT's relocation record must document the circumstance surrounding eviction from an agency-acquired property. Eviction may be undertaken for any of these reasons:

- A material breach of rental agreement.
- Failure to pay rent, except as specified under s. 704.07, Wis. Stats.
- Refusal to accept offer of a comparable replacement property.
- Use of premises for illegal purpose.
- When law requires eviction.

5.1.6 Personal Property Move Only

A relocation or move of personal property only is defined as moving personal property from a property acquired by WisDOT for project purposes where there is no need for relocation of a

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Personal property only relocation types:

- Business strip of land. Personal property located on a portion of property being acquired, but where the business located on the property can still operate after the acquisition and where the business will not incur re-establishment expenses.
- Mini-warehouse/self-storage facility. Personal property being stored within a rented storage unit(s) or rented mailboxes in a storage facility that will be acquired in whole or in part.
- Residential strip of land. Personal property located on a portion of property being acquired, but where the residence located on the project will not be affected. [Examples: vehicles, trucks and recreational vehicles (whether operational or not); boats and trailers.]
- Vacant land. Personal property stored on property where there is no residence or business.

<u>Personal property only relocation benefits</u>: An owner(s) of personal property to be relocated has two options for the move expense, either a commercial move or a self-move. The owner(s) of the personal property has the discretion to select one option listed below for moving the personal property to a replacement location, including:

- Commercial move. The WisDOT relocation agent will arrange for a commercial mover based on the lower of two acceptable estimates (not to exceed their estimated amount) and will pay the mover directly. WisDOT will prepare an inventory, including photos, of the items inventoried to be moved.
- 2. Self-move. The personal property owner is required to sign a Self-Move Agreement (RE2266) to take full responsibility of the move and will be reimbursed based on the schedules below. WisDOT will reimburse this self-move option after the relocation agent has inspected the storage unit or property to ensure its vacancy.

Schedule of Unit Size and Rates for Self-Moves		
Unit Size	Self-Move Reimbursable Rates	
50 sq. feet or under	\$200	
51 sq. feet - 100 sq. feet	\$350	
101 sq. feet - 200 sq. feet	\$500	
201 sq. feet - 300 sq. feet	\$750	
Over 300 sq. ft.	Add square footage from unit sizes above [Example: 350 sq. ft. unit is \$750+\$200=\$950]	

Schedule of Itemized Personal Property for Self-Move Reimbursement		
Operational vehicles	\$ 35 per vehicle	
Boats/trailers, utility trailers, and fifth wheel trailers	\$150 each	
Non-operating vehicles or any other item requiring towing	\$150 per trailer	
Appliances	\$ 50 per appliance	
Other fixtures/personal property	\$ 25 per item	

General procedure:

1. The regional agent will obtain a list of the names of each tenant or personal property owner and their address(s). The owner/lessee of a self-storage facility should supply the names and addresses on file through rental agreements.

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2. The WisDOT relocation agent will either hand deliver or send a certified letter to the owner of the personal property to be moved. A letter must be sent to each self-storage tenant or personal property owner. The letter will provide the two available options for moving personal property. The letter will require each owner to respond to WisDOT within 30 days of the letter with a signed Self-Move Agreement (RE2266) or their request for WisDOT to provide a commercial move. The region will identify the due date for their move option selection, a date of required vacancy (at least 90 days notice to vacate) and include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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- 3. If the owner does not remove personal property by the date indicated in the letter, the region will send, by certified mail, a 30 day notice to vacate.
- 4. The regional relocation agent will inspect the property after the 90 day notice to vacate expires to ensure all items were moved. The agent will prepare a Vacancy Notice (RE1783), which serves in part as the inspection form, for each personal property move in READS.
- 5. The regional relocation agent will submit a signed Relocation Claim Application and Release (RE1527) through READS and a cover memo identifying the move option selected, with a description of the items to be moved, unit size or an inventory, and will submit the calculations to statewide relocation facilitator for review and approval.

Any variation from this personal property move only policy requires prior approval from the BTS-RE statewide relocation facilitator.

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