



DITY -or- DON'T!

Expert advice on what kind of
PCS move is best for you.

by Heidi G. Evans, Navy spouse

As a military spouse, you probably bear the brunt of a PCS move. Beforehand your service member, like a hopeful gold digger of old, told you tales of all the money you could make (maybe thousands of dollars!) if you moved yourselves. But you've heard the do-it-yourself rumors, too—those horrific stories of families who, like the pioneers, came to the end of the road busted, broke and bedraggled.

So is a DITY (now called a Personally Procured Move, or PPM) worth the hassle? It depends.

On these pages, you'll find the scoop on what has changed in recent years. And you'll hear DITY stories from milspouses who've done it.

Here's the biggest news: Reimbursement rates decreased in April 2010, when the services changed to the Defense Personal Property

System. The new system made moving companies bid against each other and that competition lowered prices for the military. That change was a cost-saver for the government, but it generally decreased the reimbursement for military families. We now receive about 95 percent of the amount the military would pay a moving carrier for the same work.

How does it work?

The first step for any do-it-yourself move within the military is getting official counseling and creating a Form 2278, which estimates what the service member will be paid for the move. The amount paid is based on a weight the service member provides. You're paid 60 percent of this estimate in advance to cover your expenses. But be careful: If you over-

estimate your weight, the government will take every extra dollar back.

If you are considering a PPM, it's critical to estimate your weight correctly. One strategy if you've moved before: Ask a counselor at the personal property office to look up the weight from your last move.

"In the new Defense Personal Property system, the calculations are complicated. We suggest that the member work with their supporting personal property office so they can feel confident that the estimate is accurate," says Frank Piacine, the Navy's household goods director.

"Understand the amount of labor and effort required," he says. "If a service member chooses to do a PPM, they still have to report to their next duty station as scheduled."

Sound kind of grim? Don't give up yet: On the bright side, the new

system has greater flexibility to use services like shipping containers. Service members can contract for any of the services involved in a move, including loading, driving and unloading.

"Key here is allowed cost," Piacine tells *Military Spouse*. "A PPM is not an open checkbook and members are still limited to not more than 100 percent of what the government would pay for a similar move."

Kimberlie Stickney, a veteran of 15 military moves in 16 years, chose to do a complex DITY from Honolulu to Jacksonville, Fla. Most people aren't allowed to attempt this move. It takes at least 10,000 pounds of household goods before it's possible to break even. Items are packed in a shipping container, where they travel on a ship and then by rail.

Stickney denied she was brave during a mid-move interview.

"Controlling is more like it," she

She did hire an experienced crew to load the container.

"Moving companies aren't always reliable when you do it on your own," Stickney says. "You have to be very careful who you choose. The military doesn't have your back. If someone steals your stuff, they steal your stuff."

Amber Grant, a Navy wife of 11 years, has managed one good and one bad DITY move. She and her husband chose to DITY in 2008, before the change in reimbursement, and they made \$12,000. That first DITY was positive, despite having four children, including a newborn.

They moved from Monterrey, Calif., and Naval Postgraduate School, where a constant turnover in military residents made it easy to bum free packing materials from newly arrived neighbors.

Grant hired a driver through an online company. He was the key to their great experience. The driver arrived at 8 a.m. and the family's team loaded the truck, taking the back third. The driver was experienced, helpful and positive. So the Grants chose to do another DITY when they moved from Groton, Conn., to Bremerton, Wash.

This time, things got ugly.



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The Good DITY

If you're willing to pack your own things, DITY can be great. It's also preferable if you're on a tight schedule and commercial carriers can't accommodate your needs.

"PPMs during peak season are actually a wise move," Piacine says, because "the member can completely control the process. Commercial movers often cannot meet a member's desired date to move or deliver during peak season, so moving yourself is often a better strategy if you have hard timelines to meet, such as vacating a property by a set date."

Self-described "Power Mover"

laughed. "I'm completely militant type-A."

Stickney says she did it because she wanted her family's things faster than the expected 70 days for a non-DITY move. She didn't want her kids, ages 7 and 5, living on aloha furniture with a few suitcases of personal items for weeks, especially for Halloween. So she spent 30 hours packing the family while the children were in school.

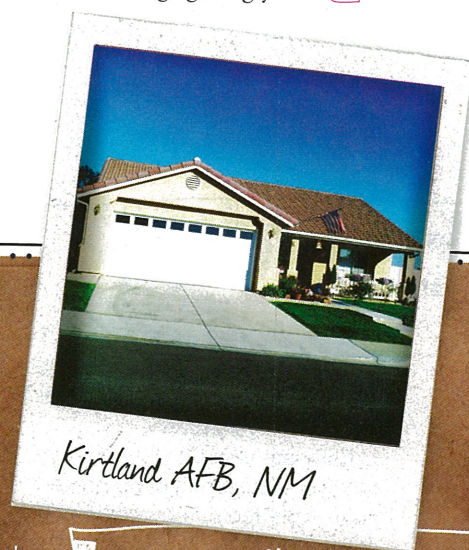
"I could totally organize everything and have it exactly the way I want it," Stickney says. No AWOL coffee pot or strangers handling her underwear. Unpacking is easier when you've organized and labeled each box yourself.

Won't You Be My Neighbor

As we brainstormed about all the components we wanted our new, expanded website to have, one of the most important was solid information about the neighborhoods surrounding our military installations. You have important questions:

- Which neighborhoods are safest?
- Which are best for families with young kids?
- Which are quietest, or most fun for a young couple without kids, or closest to the beach, or best for people who love taking long walks?

The Neighborhoods section of **baseguide.com** helps you discover the inside scoop on the places you might want to live. And it gives you the chance to rate everything from local schools and daycare centers to local restaurants and dry cleaners in your current neighborhood and neighborhoods where you've lived previously. So come visit, share your knowledge and learn from other spouses. We'd love to have you in our Neighborhood.



Kirtland AFB, NM

Read & write neighborhood reviews



See photos!



>> The nightmare DITY

The Grants discovered the dark side of doing it themselves on that second DITY move. They worked with the same online moving company, choosing to get a full truck and use it to transport their vehicles. This time, a driver arrived with a soft-sided truck. Unhelpful, the driver also didn't have the straps they needed to load their vehicles.

"We were leaving (by plane) in 36 hours and we didn't have provisions for our cars and a long holiday

Thanksgiving Day, at a cost of \$1,300.

Even worse, according to Grant, the driver violated trucking regulations and was held up for days. The Grants hired a crew to unload the truck, but had to delay that unloading for six days until the truck arrived.

"I am never doing a DITY again," she says. "It was horrible."

DITY also spelled disaster for Karen Francis, a military wife of 30 years, whose husband served in the Army, Minnesota National Guard and the Army Reserve. After a

DITY moved to arrive on time.

She drove their vehicle with their screaming cat, while her husband drove the largest rental truck available through difficult traffic. Her antiques were loaded in the back of the truck with her husband's motorcycle.

"I will never do it again. I'm just too old, and I have too much stuff," she says. "I had nightmares that the (motorcycle) was going to break loose and demolish everything into matchsticks."

At the other end, a crew from Gallaudet University, a school for the hearing impaired, unloaded her things to her third-floor apartment.

"It was the quietest move I ever had," she says, "and I have never seen anyone work so hard." ★

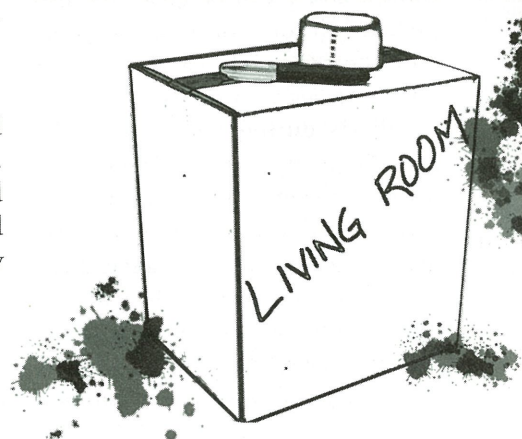


the driver violated trucking regulations and was held up for days. The Grants hired a crew to unload the truck, but had to delay that unloading for six days until the truck arrived.★

weekend was coming up," Grant says looking back.

They ended up giving their "beater" car to neighbors and having friends ship their other vehicle on

deployment, Francis and her husband moved from Minnesota to Virginia. Scrambling because her husband had just returned to active duty and received last-minute orders, they



try this!

If you are considering a DITY – now called a PPM – remember these tips from your fellow military spouses and Frank Piacine, Navy Household Goods director.

- Apply for a PPM in advance. The service member is required to have counseling before the move, which helps you avoid errors.
- Estimate your weight correctly. You receive an advance of 60 percent of your expected reimbursement. If you estimate too much weight, you will have to pay back the difference.
- Get certified weight tickets. Carefully check all the regulations regarding weight tickets. If you don't have official ones, you won't be paid and you may have to pay back your advance.

- File your claim within 45 days. If you don't file, the government will take back its advance.
- Don't move before official orders are received. You are not entitled to be reimbursed for expenses paid before you have official orders.
- Don't do it all yourself. You can negotiate with a moving company, get a crew to load or unload, or a driver to haul the items.
- Shipping containers might be a good option. The family packs the home, and then a company drops off the container for the family to

- load. The company takes it to the destination. The family unloads.
- Know your budget. You may pay a crew to load and unload your things, but don't spend more than your estimated reimbursement.
- Be organized. A DITY requires juggling endless paperwork, details and regulations. When something goes wrong, you need a plan B.
- Get packing materials from new neighbors. You can be green and save hundreds of dollars by recycling others' used boxes and paper.