

*USAG Benelux Pam 420-1*

# USAG Benelux

## Housing Service Office



Your guide to having the best housing  
experience in the Benelux community

5 April 2016

**USAG Benelux Housing – OPENING HOURS*****Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays***

9.00-13.00

13.30-16.00

***Thursdays***

9.00-13.00

13.00-15.00

***Closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Belgian Holidays*****IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

Ambulance (English).....065-44-33-34

Police.....101

SHAPE Police.....065-55-33-34

Chievres MP's.....068-27-53-01

**Assistance Operators:**

Belgian Operator (English) 1405

**Housing Division**

Chief, Housing Division 366-6391/065-32-6391

Deputy, Chief, Housing Division 366-6394/065/32.6394

Chief, Housing Service Office 366-6284/065-32-6284

In Processing/TLA section 366-6109/065-32-6109

Lease section 366-6464/065-32-6464

Customer Service 366-6437//065-32-6437

366/6438/065-32-6438

366-6439/065-32-6439

Housing Inspectors 366-6285/065-32-6285

Appliance Repair 361-5452/068-27-5452

Furnishings Office 361-5477/068-27-5477

**Transportation:**

Transportation In-Bound 366-6176/065-32-6176

Transportation Out-bound 366-6156/065-32-6156

**Other Important Numbers**

School Bus Office 423-4013/065-44-4013

SHAPE American School 423-5718/065-44-5718

Army Lodging 361-6711/065-44-6711

ICE Survey: Please provide feedback, it is paramount to our continued success.

[http://ice.disa.mil/index.cfm?fa=service\\_provider\\_list&site\\_id=554](http://ice.disa.mil/index.cfm?fa=service_provider_list&site_id=554)

Welcome to USAG Benelux!

On behalf of the US Army Benelux Garrison Commander, the Director of Public Works (DPW) and the Housing Staff, we would like to welcome you to the SHAPE/Chievres Community. We wish you an enjoyable and rewarding tour while stationed in Belgium.

All new military and civilian arrivals and those who are changing their residence within the local area should report to the USAG Benelux Housing Service Office (HSO) before entering into a lease agreement for private rental housing. This is recommended to ensure that you do not inadvertently choose housing which would conflict with DOD policy regarding fair housing practices or expose yourself to financial, environmental or health hazards.

The HSO is staffed with welcoming and knowledgeable personnel who are ready to provide you with information and answer all your questions. Our mission is to provide the best possible housing service to every customer. This service takes the form of counseling, maintaining a housing referral listing, arbitrating tenant/landlord complaints, and informing customers of local housing customs. The professionalism, knowledge and experience of the staff can save you valuable time and money as well as minimize some of the inconveniences associated with relocation. If a situation should arise and a counselor is unable to provide you with a solution for your housing problem, please ask to speak to a supervisor in the office. Please give us an opportunity to settle any questions or problems you may have experienced in the Housing Office.

This handbook is designed to provide you with information about living in private rental housing. As a representative of the United States, you have the opportunity not only to learn about Belgian customs, traditions and hospitality, but also to share American customs, traditions and hospitality with our Belgian neighbors

We hope you find this handbook useful and informative. Any suggestions for changes or improvements are welcomed. Your comments and suggestions for improvement are important and valuable for us. Additionally, please take the time to submit a customer questionnaire at our "ICE" website.

Sincerely,  
The USAG Benelux Housing Services Team

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## Overview of Housing Services

### **Housing Services Mission:**

Provide personalized and conveniently available services to assist eligible DOD Military and Civilian personnel and their families in locating suitable, non-discriminatory private rental housing.

### **Services Provided:**

- Assistance in locating a home through HSO listings, newspaper advertisement real estate agencies or on line services
- No cost rental GPS to assist with house hunting for newly arrived personnel
- Listing of private rental housing with non-discriminatory landlords
- Assistance with rental negotiations and lease renewals
- The HSO will provide you with a lease agreement in French and English.
- Language interpretation and translation when dealing with the landlord
- Administrative assistance when dealing with utility companies and translating bills.
- Inspection (Move-in, Pre and Final Out inspections) reports of the premises with tenant and/or landlord
- Assistance in resolving minor tenant and landlord complaints
- Overseas Housing Briefing to explain the process of renting a house or apartment in Belgium, the utility companies and house hunting.
- General information on military and civilian housing allowances

The HSO is a full service operation that will assist you with any situation related to your housing needs. If there is a service that you need which is not listed, please ask. If you do not receive the response or answer that you feel you need or desire, please ask to speak to a supervisor.

**SERVICES HSO CANNOT PROVIDE:**

**LEGAL ASSISTANCE:** Your servicing legal assistance office can provide you legal assistance and advise you on civil matter pertaining to Belgian Rental Law.

**SETTLING DISPUTES:** The HSO has no legal capability to commit either a landlord or a tenant in settling disputes. However, the HSO staff will mediate disputes through the negotiation process. If both parties cannot agree, the case will be referred to the Legal Assistance Office.

**FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS:** Under no circumstances will the HSO staff handle any monetary transactions for the tenant or the landlord. All financial transactions are the responsibility of the tenant and/or the landlord and will occur off US Government property. The HSO staff will not take possession of a rental property for a tenant or a landlord.

**ENTITLEMENTS:** HSO staff will provide you with a current copy of Overseas Housing Allowances (OHA) or Living Quarters Allowance (LQA) as a general guideline. Eligible personnel are encouraged to contact their finance or civilian personnel office as the best source of information.

**HOUSING DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS****EQUAL OPPORTUNITY in OFF-POST HOUSING PROGRAM (EOOPH)**

Title 42, U.S. Code, Section 3601, et seq (42 USC 3601 et seq) Public law 100-430 (1988), PL 93-383, (1974), PL 90-284 (1968) pertains to equal opportunity for all citizens in obtaining housing regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicap or familial status. These statutes are applicable in the United States. In foreign areas, the intent of the EOOPH program will be carried out to the extent possible within the laws and customs of the foreign country.

The program is intended to eliminate discrimination against DOD personnel on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, age, disability, or familial status in obtaining suitable housing accommodation in local communities. A suspected discriminatory act, with or without the filing of a formal complaint is a valid basis for investigation.

**Restrictive-Sanction List**

If you feel that you have been discriminated against because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or handicap by a landlord/agent or individuals dealing with your rental property, it is imperative that you submit a written complaint to the HSO. The HSO will investigate the complaint to determine if a violation has occurred. However, complainants should consider that the fair housing provision of the Civil Right Act is not applicable outside the United States. The equal opportunity housing program will be carried out to the extent possible within the laws and customs of Belgium. If your alleged violation has been validated, the landlord/agent will be placed on a restrictive sanction list by the USAG Benelux Command.

**NON-Referral List**

Landlords will be placed on the non-referral list by the USAG Benelux Commander when it has been determined that an individual uses unethical business practices, rents substandard housing, or has a history of failing to fulfill the terms of the rental agreement. US personnel entering into a rental agreement with a landlord who is on the non-referral list do so at their own risk. The HSO office will not give approval for the rental unit, nor will the HSO staff assist in settling any disputes or problems between the tenant and the landlord.

**Military and Civilian Personnel Housing Requirements**

Prior to seeking off-post housing, US Military and Civilian personnel regardless of service or command must in-process through the HSO, Building 209 on SHAPE within two business days of arriving in the Benelux. To complete the housing application process, personnel will be required to provide copies of their orders, verification of date of departure from last permanent duty station and verification of dependents that traveled OCONUS with the sponsor.

A housing determination will be made during the service member's initial In-processing appointment at the housing office. Service members who cannot be housed in government controlled housing will be issued a Certificate of Non-Availability (CNA) to reside off-post at government expense.



US Civilians are not authorized to reside on the installation and will aggressively seek private rental housing to reduce Temporary Quarters Subsistence Allowance (TQSA).



## Allowances

### Military Pay Entitlements and Allowances:

#### Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA)

TLA is an allowance to partially defray costs of living in transient quarters during PCS. Service members who have been issued a CNA must aggressively seek private rental housing. Service members should not rely solely on the HSO to meet this requirement. Failure to aggressively seek private rental housing together with your HSO counselor on a daily basis will result in the immediate termination of your TLA. The following reasons **ARE NOT** grounds for refusal of an adequate private rental and will force the HSO to stop your TLA.



- Too far from duty station and/or community activities
- Lack of transportation (public or private)
- Personal property will not fit into the dwelling unit
- Spouse does not like dwelling unit or its location
- Stairs in lieu of elevator (this may be waived if registered in the Exceptional Family Member Program)
- Not near enough to medical facilities (this may be waived if registered in the Exceptional Family Member Program)
- Pets not allowed
- Requirements by military unit of assignment

### Exception to Policy for TLA

Should you require an exception to the 30 day TLA policy, you must request an extension of TLA at least 10 working days prior to the 30<sup>th</sup> day of TLA. Your HSO counselor will assist you in processing your ETP.

### Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA)

OHA is paid in lieu of Basic Allowance for Housing (BHA at OCONUS) locations for service members authorized to reside in economy housing. OHA is a cost reimbursement based on allowance and defrays the service members housing cost. Failure to process the request through the USAG Benelux HSO will result in non-payment of OHA. Contact your servicing finance office for additional information. OHA includes the following three components:

- Rent
- Utility/recurring maintenance expenses
- Move-in Housing Allowance (MIHA)

### Allowance Payable:

The amount of OHA payable is based on:

- The member's reported rent amount, up to the locality OHA rental allowance plan.
- The appropriate utility amount based on the member's status.

**OHA rates are revised periodically based on currency fluctuations and annual OHA Surveys.**

**Move in Housing Allowance (MIHA)** is a onetime payment used to defray the move-in costs associated with occupying private rental at the OCONUS location.

- To be eligible for MIHA, a member must be eligible for OHA.
- Eligible members are authorized MIHA for one dwelling unit during the tour at the PDS.

**There is no MIHA payment given when:**

- Local move to another private rental
- A service member executes a PCS but remains in the same private rental
- A service member moves from government quarters to a private rental due to separation or retirement

**Two Components of MIHA:**

- MIHA miscellaneous: This is a one-time lump sum payment intended to cover items such as sinks, light fixtures, kitchen cabinets which are sometimes not provided in overseas rental properties.
- MIHA Security - is an allowance for service members assigned to areas determined to be at high-risk areas. Belgium is authorized MIHA Security.

**Advance OHA:**

Service members may request advance OHA to pay rent and/or security deposits and/or initial expenses incurred moving to economy housing. (Excludes all expenses identified by a soldier that will be used in the purchase of any real estate or living accommodations). The amount to be advanced will be determined on the basis of the anticipated expenses and the housing allowance rates prescribed by the Per Diem Committee for the OCONUS location. The HSO will validate the requested amount before the service member's commander approves the request for pay advance.

**OHA FRAUD :**

The Army believes that it is the soldier's responsibility to properly report their family and living situation to ensure a correct entitlement. If involved in OHA fraud, you are subject to possible disciplinary action IAW UCMJ (Uniform Code of Military Justice), loss of entitlements to OHA, and in the event of overpayment you will be required to reimburse the US government. Use of OHA to pay for things other than housing debts, failing to report changes in rental price or status; which results in overpayment of OHA or knowingly accepting OHA in an amount greater than your entitlement, are examples of fraud.

**Annual OHA Survey:** Each year the Per Diem committee requests data by Internet for overseas housing allowances for service members receiving OHA. You must complete this survey and indicate your annual expenses to live in private rental housing. The OHA survey is the tool the Per Diem Committee uses to determine what the OHA rate will be for that OCONUS location.

## **GUIDANCE FOR CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES HOUSING ALLOWANCES**

For detailed information please visit the CHRMA website at [www.chrma.hqusaureur.army.mil/](http://www.chrma.hqusaureur.army.mil/)

### **Allowable Expenses for Living Quarters Allowance (LQA)**

Reimbursement of living quarters allowance will not exceed the authorized annual cost of rent and utilities or the maximum allowance rate set by the Department of State, whichever is the lesser amount. DFAS uses the employee's authorized foreign currency expenses to convert the amount to US dollars using the exchange rate provided by their office. DFAS also automatically adjusts LQA payments each period when changes occur in Department of State maximum rates or foreign currency conversion rates. DFAS makes LQA allowance payment to the employee in US dollars.

### **LQA Allowable Cost**

Basic rent, electricity, fuel for heating & cooking, water, sewage, garbage and trash disposal, taxes and fire insurance.

### **As-Needed Utility Costs:**

There are some utility costs that occur on an as-needed basis; these include items such as heating oil, gas (propane/butane), wood. These items are purchased "as needed" by the employee. The employee must then submit a claim for reimbursement. These claims may be submitted in conjunction with LQA reconciliation request, or if the reconciliation has been completed, they may be submitted as they occur. The employee can also choose to retain the receipts and submit a single request for reimbursement.

### **Items that are NOT LQA Allowable Cost:**

- Agent fees except mandatory by law or custom and if lessee's payment of fee is a condition of obtaining the lease.
- Concierge or notary fees
- Telephone installation or maintenance
- Servant's wages or maintenance
- Tips
- Cleaning or redecorating
- Storage
- Garden or lawn service
- Renovation fee
- Central heating and cooling system inspections, safety inspection and related cleaning

### **Temporary Quarters Subsistence Allowance (TQSA)**

TQSA is authorized for employees hired from CONUS who are eligible for living quarters allowance to help offset the expenses of temporary lodging, meals, and laundry expenses for up to 90 days upon arrival. TQSA is paid at the new overseas duty location only. During in-processing at the new duty station, the CPAC will provide the appropriate forms that need to be completed for TQSA.

## Before you Sign the Lease.....



As you begin your house hunting, it is very important for you to know that verbal agreements are binding and can be disastrous to you in a Belgian court. Do not commit to any verbal agreement. Read each article in the lease carefully. When you are ready to sign the lease, you, the landlord and the housing official will go over the lease together; at that time, any questions you may have should be brought up and answered to your understanding. **If you do not understand something, ask a HSO counselor to explain.**

- ✓ **Ensure:** All blanks of the lease are filled in or those blanks not filled in should be crossed through.
- ✓ **Caution:** If you feel a landlord is requesting something unreasonable, check with your HSO counselor or the Legal Service Office.
- ✓ **Translation:** The USAG Benelux Lease agreement is in both French and English and the HSO staff will provide translation services for you.
- ✓ **Determine:** Did you get all of the required paperwork completed? Does the lease refer to any "house rules" which you must follow?
- ✓ **Know:** What does your rent payment cover? Does it cover just the use of the premises or does it include utilities? Which, if any, utilities are included in the rent payment? Which utilities are your responsibility to pay? What date is the rent due? As a tenant you are entitled to see all bills for costs for which you are charged. Ask to see the bills and ask the landlord to explain them to you. Usually you pay a prorated/estimated amount for utilities which will be reconciled based on annual meter reading by the respective companies.
- ✓ **Article 7 – Military Clause/Release for US Government Housing:** Article 7 allows you to cancel the lease should you receive military orders to leave your current duty station, retire from the military or civilian workforce or other stipulated reasons. This article is effective as long as the total length of a tenant's residence in a dwelling is thirty-six months or less. If you are on the waiting list for housing, be sure that Article 7 in your lease permits cancellation should you be offered government housing or be ordered to move to the barracks. The military clause is not acceptable to some landlords and may be deleted from your lease.
- ✓ **Lease Registration with City Hall:** All leases in Belgium must be registered with the local city hall. This is a requirement of your landlord.

\*Please Note: In Belgium, if you sign a three year lease and you stay past the period of the lease, without renewing your lease for the correct period of time prior to the end of your lease, you are automatically in an extended lease agreement. You will then be required to give 90 days written notice to your landlord instead of 30 days. Ask HSO if you have questions regarding this Belgian law.

We advise you to develop a working relationship with your landlord and create an atmosphere of respect. Most landlords speak a little English and are readily available when problems arise. However, keep in mind that some owners may be absent, inaccessible or unable to speak English.

Do not assume that your previous stateside rental experiences are applicable in Belgium; because they are not. Belgium laws hold the “Lessee” responsible for maintenance that would ordinarily be the responsibility of the landlord in the United States. Check with your housing authority regarding these differences.

### **Repairs/Redecorations**

Since the burden of proof is always on the tenant, it is important that you carefully inspect the leased property prior to signing the contract. Later on, during move-in condition report, both parties should agree upon a detailed written description of the condition of the premises. That report will be used when you move out. You are not responsible for normal wear and tear. But be careful : the term “wear and tear” is interpreted very strictly in Belgian courts. For example, stains on walls are not considered fair wear and tear, normal fading or discoloration of paint is.



Redecoration of the premises is usually referred to as decorative repair. It normally includes wall papering or painting of walls and ceilings. Unless damage is caused by you, your family or friends, the landlord is responsible for repair and deficiencies of the premises. This is part of their obligation to maintain the premises in proper condition. However, you must promptly notify the landlord of any necessary repair and allow them reasonable time and access to the premises to make the repairs. On the other hand, small repairs are generally your responsibility.

### **Move-In Inspection/Burden of Proof**

The HSO staff will perform a move-in inspection with you and your landlord. This inspection should be conducted within the first few days of move-in. Ideally the condition report would be done the first day. If for some reason, a HSO representative cannot be present, we strongly urge you to conduct the inspection with the landlord. The purpose of this report is to accurately reflect the condition and contents of the dwelling, and initial meter readings at the time of occupancy. It further ensures that the dwelling meets adequacy standards as determined by HSO, and protects both the tenant and the landlord from unreasonable claims when the dwelling is cleared. The burden of proof for pre-existing damages to the premises is with the tenant. You are also urged to take pictures of the house at the time of the move-in inspection to further document the condition of the house. The move-in inspection form provided by the HSO is bilingual and self-explanatory. If for whatever reason, the form is in French only, the tenant may request an English translation, but that will be done in the off peak season. Meter readings for electricity, water, and gas (if applicable) will also be annotated on this sheet. At the end of the inspection both the landlord and tenant will sign the condition report.

**Fair Wear and Tear**

Fair wear and tear (FWT) is defined as normal occurrence of expected wear to a component, system or any part of an assigned housing unit as a result of wear from normal use. An item that has been repaired or replaced before its full life expectancy has been reached due to neglect; or failure to correct the cause of the damage or improper maintenance, is considered beyond FWT.

**Snow and Ice Removal**

Snow and ice removal is a safety requirement. Although it typically does not snow in Belgium, we do have occasions with freezing rain, hail and sometimes snow. Residents of private rentals are required to remove snow and ice from around their homes. In the event of an unfortunate accident because you failed to clear your walk way, driveway or other access points to your rental property, you could be held liable and possibly sued.

**Antennas and Satellite Dishes**

You must receive approval from your landlord to install antennas or satellite dishes and the agreement should be annotated in the lease agreement.

**Yard and Garden Maintenance**

Belgians take great pride in having a well kept garden and a beautifully kept garden is very much a part of their culture.

If you are responsible for the maintenance of the yard/garden, do not enter into a VERBAL AGREEMENT with anyone to perform work. Have it in writing or you will be held liable. If you are responsible for the maintenance of the garden, you need to maintain it as much as required.. Be aware that it can be a demanding task : in the summertime, lawn mowing has usually to be done every week, hedge and shrub trimming has to be done once or twice a year. A spring and fall clean up is highly recommended to assist you with maintaining the yard.

**NOTE** : a fee for yard maintenance is never an authorized expense for both militaries and civilians, even if you are way below your cap.

**Bills**

Pay bills within 10 days of receipt. You can pay utility bills and rent at the Belgian Post Office, with or without an account. You can also pay at Monte Paschi (located on SHAPE), Fortis or Andrews Federal Credit Union with an account.

**NOTE:** Money for bill payment must be deposited in your account at the Belgian Facilities five days prior to the payment date.

### School Bus Information

DODDEA school busses will provide transportation to and from school from private rental housing areas. Eligible personnel will be required to in-process at the School Bus Office in the SHAPE American School. Personnel who live outside the current school bus routes will be responsible for arranging private transportation for their children to get to school.



### Rent Payment

**Withholding rent as leverage is against the law in Belgium.** Under Belgian law, the rental contract you sign requires you to pay your rent on the first of each month. Should you fail to do that and your case goes to court, you will be found in violation of the law and be required to pay the rent in question, and legal fees. This action will also remove you from the moral high ground you might have held against the landlord to fix whatever problem is at the source of your dispute.

### Required or Requested Maintenance or Improvements

Are there improvements that you may expect or want to ask the landlord to do to the house? You must talk to the landlord about these issues well in advance of the contract signing appointment so that the landlord has time to research the possibility and cost of the improvements you want to make. Be careful of the verbal agreement; put requested work in writing well in advance to give the landlord an opportunity to determine feasibility. Ensure that agreed upon work is in Clause 17 of the lease agreement and the work is to be completed by a certain date. Some things worth considering are:

- ✓ Painting or wallpapering
- ✓ Replacing carpet
- ✓ Screens (hard to obtain)

We cannot predict how a landlord will react to your questions. Some make improvements, while others refuse to do so. Generally, the landlord's prior experience and financial situation makes the difference. Advance warning to the landlord can make things easier for the new tenant. Naturally, all your requests cannot always be answered on the spot. The landlord must be given time to consider his options and make rational decisions. It never hurts to ask!

We often have questions about installing hot water outlets for US washing machines. When the heating system is close to the laundry room, the landlord generally agrees to install a hot water pipe. Some landlords may increase the price of rent if you request that they install US hook-ups.

### Security Deposits

A security deposit is required on all private leased dwellings; it may equate to one (for US Housing leases) or two (for Belgian leases) months' rent. The deposit is the landlord's safeguard in the event that the tenant moves out and leaves unpaid bills or damages to the property.

### Energy Conservation

**RULE OF THUMB:** The more energy you consume, the higher your bill will be. Americans typically use more water, electricity, and heating fuel than Europeans.

**MONITOR YOUR UTILITY METERS :** use of electric space heaters is **Not RECOMMENDED** and will result in very high electric bills. Residents are urged to conserve energy, use fluorescent lighting, unplug transformers when not in use and repair dripping faucets or running toilets.

### Security systems

Rental property should be equipped with door and window locks as a minimum.

Alarm systems are an option and can be beneficial in deterring break-ins.

### Utility Costs

In Belgium, electricity, water and gas (if applicable) meters are read by the utility companies on an annual basis. Your utility bills are based on the previous resident's consumption. You are urged to utilize the meter reading form the HSO provides you with, monitor your usage and adjust your monthly estimation as necessary.



### Gas and Electric

Gas and electric meters are read only once per year in Belgium. Meters are read by an official meter reader or by the tenant. You may receive a letter requesting your meter reading which must be completed and mailed back or it can be done on the internet. The time of year when this is done varies from commune (town) to commune. You will receive gas and electric bills on a monthly basis. The bills you will receive on a monthly basis are only an estimate based on the previous tenants or your previous year's bill. After receiving the first catch-up bill at the end of the year, the monthly estimates will be adjusted to reflect the actual usage.

### Water

Utility bills for water are usually sent quarterly. Each residence should have a water meter that shows usage. The meter should be read when you move in. Most communes now include a pollution charge as part of the annual bill. The pollution charge is based on the amount of water used. If a water bill arrives with a previous tenants name on it, bring the bill to your housing office to have it corrected. Just like your electric bills, the water bill you will receive is also an estimate based on the previous tenants or your previous year's consumption.

### Guidelines for Meter Readings

You are advised to read your meters periodically. Charts for computing gas and electric usages are available at the housing office. When using these charts, write down the meter reading number when your bill arrives and compute the consumption cost to compare to the amount paid. Any cost over your payment will be part of the annual catch-up cost.



### How to avoid the unpleasant and sometimes expensive surprise when your first catch-up bill arrives:

- Note original meter readings when you take occupancy. Ensure this is noted on your move-in inspection.
- Monitor your usage each month. Take a new reading when you receive your first estimated bill. Subtract your original reading or previous reading to determine your actual consumption.
- Compare the amount you actually consumed to the estimated amount the company has set for your home.
- If you are considerably over, set money aside every month so you will be prepared to pay for the large catch-up bill. Contact the HSO Staff to assist you with adjusting your monthly/quarterly payment with the utility company.
- Keep all receipts to prove how much you have paid.
- **VERY IMPORTANT!: DO NOT OVERPAY.** The utility company will not accept overpayment and will return the overpayment to your financial institution. If you feel that you should pay more (or less), you must have the housing office staff contact the electric company to adjust the bill amount. Without doing this, it causes confusion in most cases.

### Oil Heat

When you rent a house that uses heating oil “Mazout”, you will need to make arrangements to fill the tank to the same level upon departure, [except if otherwise](#) annotated in your lease agreement “Special Clause 17”. During the winter you should monitor usage to avoid running out of oil. Some companies will make routine deliveries throughout the year. Oil prices are usually cheaper in the summer; so many families arrange for the delivery at the cheaper price and start the winter with a full tank. There is usually a minimum amount of oil that you should order to get a discount on the price. If you have less delivered to keep your bill lower, you will be paying considerably more per liter. Remember to put money aside for oil deliveries. If you come in to the housing office our staff can assist you in ordering mazout.

**Garages/Basements:** In Belgium, garages and basements are not intended as storage for personal property. They are typically below ground, damp and only intended to house the mechanical systems. Residents are encouraged to find alternative storage for personal property.

### Telephone Services and Internet Service Providers

There are a few different telephone companies you can use and many Internet options to choose from while in Belgium. Actually most companies provide telephone, Internet and TV options. 3 companies have a representative at Shape at least once a week : Belgacom, Voo and Mobistar. Bills are sent every month in Belgium.

We suggest that you research all available options and choose the one that best fits your budget and needs.



### Television Sets

American television sets (NTSC) can only be used for AFN Television (American Forces Network). Multisystem Entertainment system (TV/DVD) can receive both NTSC and PAL signals and are compatible with multisystem. However, they must be set to European voltage while in Europe and then be switched to American voltage upon return to the United States.

### American Forces Network Television

American Forces Network (AFN) Television, part of the American Forces Radio and Television Services is broadcast throughout the Benelux. However, AFN is transmitted on a horizontal frequency and viewers must live in the beam footprint to receive it. While some areas may receive the frequency with the antenna that comes with your American Television, others require a special indoor antenna that is sold at the PX. If an outdoor roof antenna is needed, be sure to check with your landlord before mounting anything to the structure of the house.

### American Forces Network Radio

AFN Radio is broadcast throughout the Benelux. AFN radio provides its listeners with a full range of informative programs in English. News service and live sports are broadcast from the US via satellite. Local programming includes daily currency exchange rates, weather, school news, and community events.

### Cable Service/Satellite

Many residents subscribe to a cable television service to extend their range of channels through Belgacom. This includes programs from Great Britain (BBC) and the Netherlands (which broadcasts many American programs in their original English version). AFN is not a part of this cable package. Satellite systems are also available locally and require approval of the landlord to install a satellite dish on the property or installed on the house.

### Renters Insurance

Insurance can be a difficult subject but it is a necessity while living in Belgium. In the SHAPE leases, the landlord is usually responsible to maintain insurance on the rental property, although the landlord may require the tenant to obtain their own insurance. This is a provision of your lease agreement Clause 6. The amount of coverage required must be computed based on the value of the property, the landlord must be a part of the process and will be able to provide you information on the value of the property and current insured value of the property.

- Private insurance policy with a company established in Belgium
- US Company authorized to do business in Belgium
- Only obtain the minimum insurance required by law!!
  - Ensure that the house/apartment building itself is covered and nothing else. If there were a fire in your house, the cost of repairing the house is covered by your insurance. The landlord's insurance covers his area of responsibility.



What Optional Coverage can be included?

Renters insurance for personal property is highly recommended, since there is no obligation for your landlord to reimburse your lost or damaged belongings, even if it is not your fault.

Liability insurance protects you if someone is injured on your rental property, which could result in legal action. Legal Assistance Insurance is an insurance that covers any legal expenses (lawyer's fees, etc) and gives you a legal advocate to protect you and your rights.

### **Trash Disposal Recycling**

Recycling is a Law in Belgium. It is the responsibility of all residents to participate in local recycling programs, more specifically the use of biological waste, paper waste and household waste bags. It is very important to separate trash and to place it into the proper bags. Don't collect, mix and store full garbage bags on the balcony, terrace or in the basement. It is the tenant's responsibility to ensure waste is properly sorted and placed into the proper container. Failure to comply with Belgian trash laws may result in severe fines

Each commune establishes its own method of waste collection and collection days. You will receive a flyer with current trash pickup days for your commune at the time of the lease signing and also in the Belgian mail.

- Special color coded garbage bags for general, paper, plastic, and glass
- Waste collection points or container parks for recycling
  - Bottles, cans, papers
  - Cardboard, plastics
  - Hazardous waste (batteries, paints, cleaning solvents etc)

Your commune will announce a once a year bulk trash pick-up for non-hazardous and non-recyclable items such as large bulky items; mattress, box spring, sofas, and tables etc. Most communes are not giving this service anymore.

### **Garbage Fee**

Sort and recycle trash. Garbage bags are for household trash and recycle bags are for recyclable materials. The annual garbage fee is set by the Belgian Government and you must pay the bill when it comes.

### **Income Taxes**

Request for income tax is sent in May addressed to the primary family member.

Take the request and the family member's ID card to Customer Service in Bldg 253 and return the completed form to the Belgium Ministry of Finance. Failure to return the packet is costly.

## Radio & TV Tax

Turn paperwork into the “Status and Classification” office in building 210 on SHAPE



## Ventilation of Rental Property

Residents must ventilate their homes daily by opening windows to create a cross-draft which will dry the house out. By ventilating your home daily for 10-15 minutes and after each shower, mold and mildew should not be a problem. If mold and mildew do develop, open windows in the affected area to facilitate drying, scrub the mold spots with a solution of 1 cup chlorine bleach and 1 gallon of warm water rinse and then wipe dry. In the case of mold on painted surfaces, allow this solution to soak in, then scrub lightly, rinse and wipe dry (**do a test first on a small area, to avoid paint damage**). In bathrooms without windows, make sure that the ventilation shaft is open and do not close the bathroom door following showers and baths. The bathroom will benefit when cross-ventilating other parts of the house.

## Septic Tanks

A rental property with a septic tank requires emptying at least once a year or when the tank is full. The septic system has natural bacteria that digest the waste. Using household chemicals such as Drano, Clorox, Pine-Sol (etc) can kill the bacteria. Products to refresh the bacteria can be found in the local grocery stores.

If you should notice a septic smell, ensure that all smell (sink drains) traps have water in them. Run water for a few seconds weekly in all of your sinks, toilets, showers, bathtubs, hot water heater overflow drains, etc. Pour water into any floor drains weekly. When the water dries up, the gases in the waste water pipes flow back up the pipe and into your home. When the water is present, it blocks the gas. If your house smells like a sewer at random intervals, you have a smell trap that's dried up.

## Transformers

Transformers plug into the 220v outlet and allow one to use 110v appliances. Transformers come in a variety of sizes and consume a lot of energy when plugged in. Clocks and other timed devices may not properly function when plugged into a transformer due to the difference in cycles. It is extremely important to know the watt rating of your transformers. Transformers typically rate 15W, 75W, 150W, 300W, 750W or 1000W. Check the watt rating on the appliance that you are plugging into the transformer to ensure it does not exceed that of the transformer. You should avoid plugging multiple appliances into one transformer as the total watt may exceed that of the transformer. Transformers use a lot of electricity as they continue to draw power even when the connected appliance is turned off. Transformers should be disconnected from the outlet when not in use to save on energy consumption.

### Government Furniture

Military personnel with an approved certificate of non-availability (CNA) to occupy private rental housing are authorized to receive furniture support. DOD Civilians eligible to receive LQA (excluding contractors) living in private rental housing or in government quarters are entitled to furniture support. Items available include:

- Wardrobes (quantity allowed depends on family size)
- Stove, refrigerator, washer, dryer, and dishwasher
- Loaner furniture

\* The availability and quantity allowed for some items may vary depending on the budget. You should call CFMO (Centralized Furnishing Management Office) at DSN 361-5477 or 068/27 5477 if you have questions.

### Loaner sets

Inbound personnel with full joint federal travel regulation weight allowance or elective joint federal travel regulations weight allowance who elect to ship their household goods, are authorized loaner furniture for a maximum of 90 days. To have these items longer than 90 days you must have an exception to policy. All outbound personnel are authorized loaner sets for 60 days.

Customers performing convenience moves are responsible for the transportation costs of and any damage to government furniture and appliances incurred during a move. The costs for pick up and re-issue/installation of household appliances will also be the responsibility of the customer.



## Proper Reporting Procedures on Damages to Private Rental Housing

When damages occur to your quarters during delivery of household goods and/or Unaccompanied baggage, you **MUST** record the damages on one of the following Documents listed below.

- Carrier/Agent Survey Sheet
- DD Form 1840
- DD Form 619
- DD Form 619-1
- Inventory List
- Plain Sheet of Paper (if necessary)



When damages occur, the resident must contact the Quality Control (QC) inspector to report the damages.

The QC inspector will have the Lead Packer note the damages on DD Form 1780.

If the Lead Packer refuses to note the damages on DD Form 1780, the QC inspector will make a statement as to why the Lead Packer will not note the damages or how the damage occurred.

If the QC inspector is not available, the resident must note how the damages occurred on one of the documents listed above. The resident should ask the Lead Packer to acknowledge the damage and record it on the carrier/agent survey sheet, a plain piece of paper, or one of the listed documents above

After the resident has recorded his/her statement on one of the documents above, he/she will provide a copy of the statement to the USAG Benelux Transportation Office and a copy to the HSO to be placed in the lease file.

The resident must also notify the landlord immediately of the damage and a professional estimate will be prepared for the necessary repairs. The original estimate will be provided to the QC inspector from the transportation office.

The USAREUR Consolidated Personnel Property Shipping Office (CPPSO) QC Division will forward, under formal correspondence, documentation of the damages and the documented estimate for repair. For Private Rental housing, the payment for damages will be made to the landlord via check or electronic fund transfer, as specified by the landlord.

Remember that the landlord has nothing to do with the moving company. The landlord will charge you for those damage, except if you can prove someone else will pay.

# Deployment Information Guide

The information below is an excerpt of the Deployment information guide. The guide covers policies and procedures regarding the occupancy of private rental housing during deployment. It is intended to provide instruction and to advise personnel regarding their deployment. The housing division personnel are the points of contact for any housing related issues regarding deployment. Please get an information package from the housing office for details. Personnel who reside in private rental housing have the following options:

## **Retain private rental Housing**

- Will continue to be paid OHA
- Must notify their landlord and HSO of extended absence
- Provide the name, duty address, duty and home phone of person who will be responsible for the care and upkeep of the quarters to the landlord and the HSO

## **Move out of private rental housing (prior to or during deployment)**

- Should notify their landlord in advance if you intend to move out of private rental housing
- Written notice must be given to the landlord as specified by the lease agreement and the lease requirements for cleaning, damages and renovation fees must be fulfilled
- Movement and storage of household goods during deployment will be at government expense.
- Personnel subsequent move into new quarters upon return from deployment will also be at government expense

## **Moving from One Set of Economy Quarters to Another**

Moving from one set of economy quarters to another can be costly and difficult. A termination notice must be given in accordance with the contract (PCS clause does not apply here), the old rental unit must be cleared and all the administrative paperwork (OHA, turn-in of government furnishings and appliances) must be completed prior to or in conjunction with signing of the new lease agreement. Examples of situations not qualifying for a government funded move are:

1. Moving from one off post house to another off post house
2. If the HSO has offered you government quarters at some point and you turned them down.

Personnel may request for the Furnishings Branch to move only government appliances from one set of quarters to another at a cost. The cost includes disconnection/reconnection and transportation charges. This fee cannot be waived.

# Termination of your Lease Agreement

## *It Pays to Plan Ahead*

The USAG Benelux HSO will assist you with termination of your private rental property. Report to HSO with a copy of PCS orders 45-90 days prior to vacating private rental housing. The HSO Staff will assist you in completing the termination package. All documents must be filled out and returned to HSO prior to clearance of private rental housing whether you are departing the area, resigning, retiring, moving to government controlled housing, or moving from one private rental to another. You are encouraged to have a pre- inspection at least 45 days prior to your termination date to assist you with clearing details so you can have a successful out inspection.

### **Termination Notice**

Per the terms of your lease agreement and Belgian law, you are required to provide your landlord a MINIMUM of 30 days written notification of your intent to terminate your lease agreement. ***Notice of termination should be sent by registered mail or hand delivered with a signature from the landlords indicating they received the termination notice.***

### **Return of the Security Deposit**

The majority of customers vacating private rental housing will receive all or most of their security deposit. However, failure to return the mazout to the original level, not properly cleaning the house or failing to repair damages to the property that are considered beyond normal wear and tear may incur damage costs that may be equal to or exceed the security deposit.

### **Cleanliness and condition of property for termination**

It is imperative that the house is clean, the yard has been cleaned and maintained and that all damages have been repaired. The HSO staff can perform a pre-inspection to assist you with preparing for termination of the private rental.

### **Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA) Outbound**

Service members are entitled to a maximum of 10 nights of TLA when they reside in private rental housing. Requests for extension need to be submitted in advance through the HSO office.





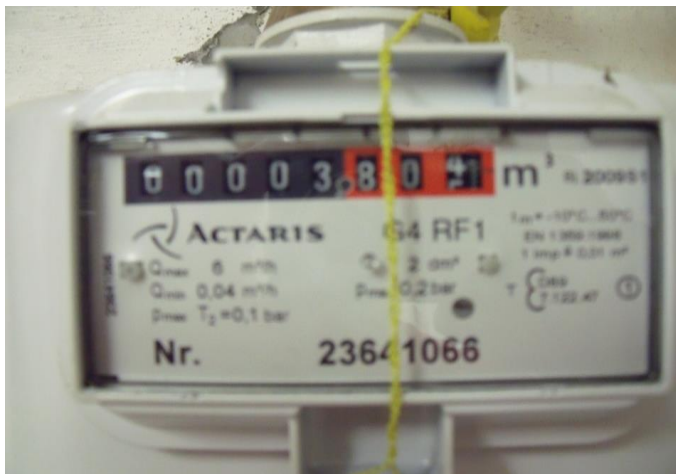
## Water Meter

This is what your water meter looks like, it can normally be found in the basement or garage.



## Gas Meter

This is what your gas meter looks like. It can be found in the basement, garage or in a white box outside the property.



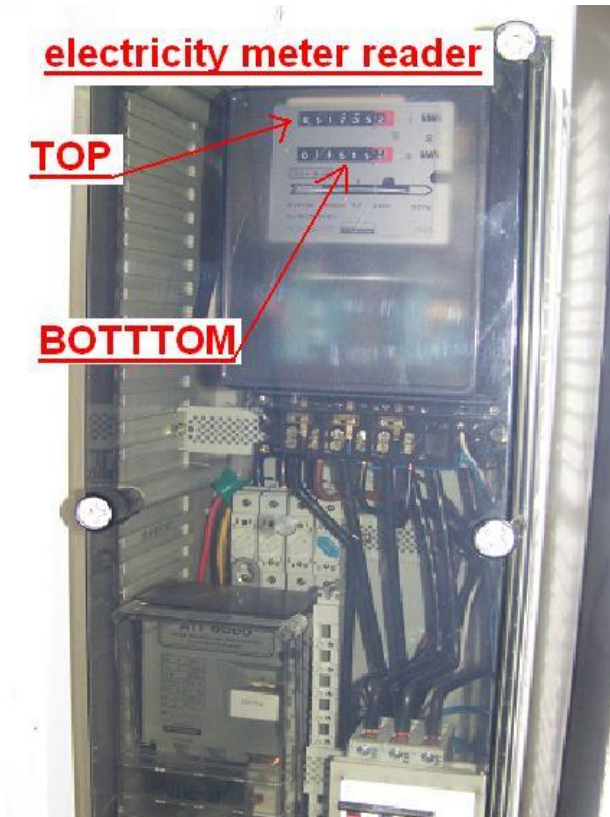
## Electric Meter

This is what your electric meter can look like. There are different types of electric meters. Some are just day meters; others are day and night meters, while others are day, night and differential.

DAY METER – Identified by a symbol of the sun – usually the top line

NIGHT METER – Identified by a symbol of the moon - usually the bottom line

### Picture of a day and night meter





**078/35.33.33**

Press 1 -> Dutch

2 -> French

3 -> German

4 -> **ENGLISH**

## Maintain your central heating system

In order to optimize your central heating system, gas or fuel (mazout), it is very important that the followings items be checked once a month.

### Water pressure of the furnace and radiators

If the water pressure is not correctly adjusted, you could have some cold radiators and the performance of the furnace will decrease.



This is a good pressure. The water pressure must be between 1 and 1.5 bars and maximum 2 bars when the system is hot.



To add water in the system, you will find 2 shut off valves around the furnace, coming from a water line. Open first the valve of the water line and then the one going to the radiator/furnace lines. **Be ready to shut off the valve as soon as the pressure shows 1.5 bars.**

As soon as the pressure is OK, you have now to bleed your radiators. Bleeding your radiators is a very easy job and doing it once a month will allow you to save around 20 % of the mazout or gas consumption, compared to a central heating system.

## Radiators



Open the thermostatic or regular valve to the maximum.



Unscrew, slowly, the bleeder valve and put your cup underneath. As soon as water comes out, shut the valve off.

### HOW TO BLEED YOUR RADIATORS

As soon as the water pressure has been adjusted, prepare a screwdriver or a key to bleed radiators. Also have a cup or a bowl to collect the water dripping from the bleeder.

If there is not enough water dripping from the bleeder during the operation, you will have to add water again in the system.

While you are bleeding the radiators, you will also need to open and close the thermostatic valves, 2 or 3 times to allow the rubber gaskets, inside the radiator valves, to work correctly.

**HELP! I HAVE A WATER LEAK!**

If for any reason, you should have a faucet or a toilet leaking, the first thing is to shut off the “Schell” faucet.



“Schell” shut off valve faucet underneath the bathroom sink cupboard



“Schell” shut off valve faucet of the flush tank.

This will temporally allow you to stop your dripping faucet or flush tank and avoid damages and/or high water consumption.