

15 FAM 250 HOUSING PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

*(CT:OBO-19; 10-27-2010)
(Office of Origin: OBO)*

15 FAM 251 LOCAL REAL ESTATE MARKET

*(CT:OBO-19; 10-27-2010)
(Uniform State/USAID/Commerce/Agriculture/DIA)*

A survey of the local real estate market provides an objective assessment of current market conditions and enables the post to select competitively from a range of housing (see 15 FAM 212.6). The assessment of the local market should include background information on the general availability of housing, requirements for residential security standards, and other security considerations (location of schools, costs, etc.). Posts should use the results of the survey to document conditions relating to the cost and availability of suitable housing, and establish rental ceilings in consultation with the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO). If housing that meets space standards is not available in the local market, post must prepare appropriate supporting information.

15 FAM 252 HOUSING SELECTION

15 FAM 252.1 Cost

*(CT:OBO-19; 10-27-2010)
(Uniform State/USAID/Commerce/Agriculture/DIA)*

Cost is a prime consideration in the selection of housing. Costs of residential properties will vary according to location, quality of construction, and amenities (verandas or balconies, recreational facilities, gardens, garages). A comparative review of annual rental costs should be a basis for housing selection. In addition, independent market surveys should be used to support post selections. The rental cost at many posts will also be governed by OBO/post-developed rental rate benchmarks.

15 FAM 252.2 Space

(CT:OBO-19; 10-27-2010)

(Uniform State/USAID/Commerce/Agriculture/DIA)

Space is an important criterion in selecting properties for housing abroad, but it is not the overriding factor, particularly in markets where housing availability is limited and/or other restrictions limit where employees may live. Selection criteria should include, but not be limited to, design layouts, special employee circumstances, desired locations (including as wide a variety as possible, approved by the regional security officer (RSO) or post security officer (PSO)), availability of normal amenities (electricity, telephone, indoor plumbing), size, and ability to meet safety and health criteria and security requirements.

15 FAM 252.3 Distance

(CT:OBO-19; 10-27-2010)

(Uniform State/USAID/Commerce/Agriculture/DIA)

In applying these guidelines, post management and the post interagency housing board (IAHB) must seek suitable housing at the best possible cost to the U.S. Government. All locations within reasonable commuting time, that meet security criteria and that meet or can be modified to meet safety criteria, should be considered. The Washington, DC average one-way commuting time of 45 minutes for U.S. Government employees will be considered reasonable, unless the post IAHB, upon recommendation of the RSO or regional medical officer (RMO), establishes a longer or shorter time to address security or environmental concerns. Geographic housing considerations beyond security or environmental reasons (e.g., employee convenience) are not acceptable.

15 FAM 252.4 Security Considerations

(CT:OBO-19; 10-27-2010)

(Uniform State/USAID/Commerce/Agriculture/DIA)

- a. As residential security considerations are U.S. Government policy under 12 FAM 300, the RSO/PSO must identify all suitable locations where the security environment relative to crime, civil disorder, terrorism, and police coverage is considered acceptable. The RSO/PSO must provide recommendations on the types of housing most suited to the post security environment. The RSO/PSO must conduct or supervise an inspection of those prospective residential properties selected for*

inclusion in the housing inventory and determine if the property can be secured in accordance with current residential security guidelines.

- b. Properties requiring extensive security upgrades must be carefully considered in the context of the availability of appropriate Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) funding. All posts, particularly those where the established residential security guidelines require upgrades not normally provided in local housing, must request approval and funding for such improvements from the residential security program through the RSO. **DS may fund security upgrade costs. These costs must not be funded from any leasehold accounts.***
- c. At all posts, but particularly those where the crime or terrorism threat level is rated as high or critical, the post interagency housing board (IAHB) should select residences that inherently maximize the safety and security of employees, while minimizing additional supplemental resources needed to further upgrade security, e.g., guards and residential security equipment. The objective of the residential security program is to acquire housing that provides a degree of security appropriate to the local threat level. To assist in the selection process, the following types of housing should be considered:*
 - (1) **Apartment buildings:** Post's emergency action committee (EAC) should determine if apartment buildings are preferable to scattered apartment units, detached houses, townhouses, or cluster housing. In some instances, U.S. Government buildings and cluster housing may be considered attractive targets for terrorist bombings or mobs. Conversely, to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of supplemental security protection (e.g., local guards), apartment buildings and cluster housing within a compound or small geographic area offer the best protection where crime is the major threat. For apartment buildings and high-occupancy cluster housing, location, available setback, type of construction, and access controls are important selection criteria when considering protection against the terrorism threat. The EAC, in consultation with the RSO, must weigh all these factors before recommending that OBO lease, purchase, or build any apartment buildings or high-occupancy cluster housing; and*
 - (2) **Apartment units:** If an apartment building does not have adequate security protection, posts may acquire individual apartments, focusing their selection on units above the second floor. At high and critical threat posts, the total number of apartments in any one building should be reasonably limited so as to not present an attractive concentration of mission personnel unless the building, as a whole, has effective perimeter or access*

controls.

- d. In general, comprehensive lock, lighting, grille, and gate systems provide maximum physical security under the control of the occupant. In some instances, they may be sufficient and preferable.*
- e. The RSO/PSO must approve all housing acquisitions; in cases of disagreement, no property may be leased or occupied until the dispute is resolved.*

15 FAM 252.5 Safety, Health, and Environmental Requirements

(CT:OBO-19; 10-27-2010)

(Uniform State/USAID/Commerce/Agriculture/DIA)

- a. In accordance with 15 FAM requirements, safety, health, and environmental hazards must be identified in the selection of housing to eliminate the possibility of dangerous conditions that can cause serious injuries or fatalities. Posts must verify that the post occupational safety and health officer (POSHO) has inspected residences under consideration for purchase or lease (long-term leased (LTL), short-term leased (STL), and living quarters allowance (LQA)) for safety, health, and environmental hazards, and that those hazards have been effectively controlled or eliminated. Prior to occupying a residence, the POSHO must certify that the following requirements are met:*
 - (1) Removal of all unvented gas flash water heaters that cannot be relocated or properly vented to the outdoors in accordance with manufacturer's instructions;*
 - (2) Inspection by a qualified technician of all combustion heating equipment and systems for proper operation;*
 - (3) For properties with swimming pools, installation of at least a 4-foot high fence or other barrier surrounding the entire pool and separating all pools from residences and other structures that are non-pool related. The gate must be self-latching, self-closing, lockable, and the latch must be located at least 4.5 feet off the ground;*
 - (4) Installation of OBO/OPS/SHEM-provided carbon monoxide alarms in any residence that has combustion-type appliances (except cooking appliances, such as ovens and stoves), an attached, totally enclosed garage, or exterior combustion appliances that are located*

- near windows; and*
- (5) *Grounding of the electrical system.*
- b. *In addition, the POSHO should utilize the Department of State Residential Safety, Health, and Fire Prevention Awareness Checklist (see 15 FAM Exhibit 111) as a guide to assist in identifying other unsuitable conditions in residences, such as mold, insect infestation or utility-related problems, to be resolved prior to occupancy. Posts are strongly encouraged to install ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) for electrical outlets in all bathrooms and kitchens. GFCIs are currently required for electrical outlets around all swimming pools.*

15 FAM 252.6 Natural Hazards Safety Guidance

(CT:OBO-19; 10-27-2010)

(Uniform State/USAID/Commerce/Agriculture/DIA)

- a. *In accordance with 15 FAM requirements to provide safe, secure, and functional housing, post management and the post interagency housing board (IAHB) will follow the guidance below to seek suitable housing with the lowest possible risk to life safety due to natural-hazard events such as floods, landslides, tropical cyclones (hurricanes), and earthquakes.*
- b. *Posts must report natural-hazard-related issues (e.g., concerns about seismic activity; chronic and historic flooding; windows, doors, and exterior structures vulnerable to high winds or flying debris; unstable or eroding slopes or foundations; etc.) that might constitute a threat to life safety and which might qualify for assessment and mitigation under the Natural Hazards Program (NHP). All projects will require coordination of planning and funding efforts within the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO), such as the Civil/Structural Engineering Division in the Office of Design and Engineering, in the Directorate of Program, Development, Coordination, and Support (PDCS/DE/CSE); the Office of Area Management in the Directorate of Operations (OPS/AM); the Office of Facility Management in the Directorate of Construction, Facility, and Security Management (CFSM/FAC); and/or other offices.*
- c. *OBO civil, geotechnical, and structural engineers assist posts to identify potential life-safety threats due to natural events and develop and implement solutions to reduce future injury to personnel and damage to facilities. To define issues and implement solutions, PDCS/DE/CSE works with posts to identify qualified local engineers and construction contractors to assist in OBO efforts; however, if local resources are not readily available, PDCS/DE/CSE enlists the services of U.S. architectural*

and engineering (A/E) consultants and construction contractors. Many of our mitigation projects are post-managed by the GSO or FM. Larger projects, which may exceed post resources, are managed by OBO.

d. Posts in high-seismic areas (see the OBO Natural Hazards Program on the OBO Web page, OBO/PDCS/DE, Site Index) must:

- (1) Address the seismic adequacy of residential units (primarily in multi-unit buildings) and seek housing that is seismically the best available;*
- (2) Include seismic life safety in the housing purchase or lease-decision matrix; and*
- (3) Evaluate the seismic safety of residential buildings using any one (or more) of the following means and methods:*
 - (a) Assessing seismic adequacy by engaging the services of a local structural engineer (either by owner and/or by post);*
 - (b) Requesting municipality assistance in obtaining design/construction documents (building permit sets) to aid in determining seismic safety; and*
 - (c) Requesting services of OBO in-house professional engineering staff and/or OBO seismic consultants.*

NOTE: Posts must coordinate their residential seismic assessment efforts with OBO's Natural Hazards Program.

Given that seismically adequate housing stock is relatively limited in some regions of the world, the guidance in this section must be followed as part of a rational plan to reduce seismic risk in coordination with OBO. Nevertheless, in view of serious life safety concerns in high-seismic areas, as well as, the impracticality of mitigating the seismic inadequacy of leased buildings or the costs of possibly abandoning them as inadequate, it is only prudent to include seismic considerations in pre-acquisition activities.

e. For further information or assistance, contact OBO's Natural Hazards Program Manager in the Civil/Structural Engineering Division, in the Office of Design and Engineering, in the Directorate of Program, Development, Coordination, and Support, in the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO/PDCS/DE/CSE).

15 FAM 253 THROUGH 259 UNASSIGNED