ESSENTIALS
NUTS AND BOLTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

MY DALLAS STORY | MOVING CHECKLIST | YOUR FIRST 30 DAYS
IMPORTANT LAWS | TAX RATES | HELPFUL NUMBERS AND WEBSITES

PHOTO: MICHAEL SAMPLES

RICHARDSON PUBLIC LIBRARY
‘YOU’RE NOT AN OUTSIDER IF YOU’RE NOT FROM TEXAS. PEOPLE ARE WELCOMING.’

JEFF COUSENS

OCCUPATION: Managing Partner - Dallas Sales & Marketing, Lucas Group

CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD: Richardson

How did you choose Richardson?
Having four kids, we wanted good public schools, not too far out in the suburbs or from work. The commute was a big thing for me. As long as I get out of the door by 7, I’m usually at work by 7:15. I think it’s easy. Mind you, I came from Chicago and the Bay area and it’s way worse there. The neighborhood’s great for the kids. If we could live somewhere, no kids, it would be in Uptown.

What do you like most about living there?
You’re not an outsider if you’re not from Texas. People are welcoming. It’s been very eclectic - different people, different backgrounds, different family situations ... all that stuff. It is sort of like a melting pot.

What advice do you have for someone freshly relocated?
It’s the mindset. If you come open minded, people are really friendly. Get used to how spread out it is. If it’s 10 miles away, time wise it’s going to be more. The freeways are different. They’re looping, turning, with interchanges. Once you get acclimated, you learn you don’t have to go down 75 to get downtown. You can take the Toll Road, or cut through to Preston and take it all the way down.

I’ve had clients relocate here. I tell them, take time to learn the neighborhoods because they are all very different. Eat in the neighborhood restaurants and try to meet some people. Make sure what you do fits in with that community.

How’s the work environment here?
Well, I do recruiting ... so the market here was a big attraction. We’re not tied to oil and gas like Houston is. It’s very diverse. You have Hilti Tools moving here from Oklahoma, and Toyota moving from California. It’s a hot market. In the sales and marketing niche, I’ve had trouble keeping up with the workload, which I am not complaining about. The work pool is very strong. There are lots of people coming from retail and e-commerce.

MOVING CHECKLIST

SIX WEEKS UNTIL MOVE:

- Contact a real estate agent in Dallas. Many advertise in this guide.
- Start getting estimates from moving companies.
- Find out what expenses your employer will cover.

FOUR WEEKS:

- Check the pre-registration procedures for enrolling children in school. (See Education section on p. 130.) Get children’s transcripts and a list of textbooks they are currently using. Obtain a copy of the grading system at the current school. Ask teachers for a statement describing the student’s achievement level and interests. Get official written descriptions of any unusual courses taken.

THREE WEEKS:

- Request copies of medical, dental, veterinary records, and birth certificates.
- Notify the post office of your new address and obtain a change-of-address kit. Send change-of-address cards to friends, subscription services, creditors, alumni associations, and insurance companies.
- Begin packing seldom-used items and dispose of unwanted items through charities. (Get receipts for tax purposes.)
- Contact the IRS for forms and regulations regarding tax-deductible moving expenses.
- Transfer or arrange for insurance in Dallas to cover your home, furnishings, and automobile.
- Arrange to have appliances, utilities, laundry, phone, and cable television disconnected. Check on deposits. Set up connections at your new home.
- Make travel arrangements.
- Handle bills, stocks, investments, and banking transfers.
- Make special arrangements for transporting pets and plants. Some plants may not be transported across state lines — check with your moving company.
- Clean cupboards.
- Plan remaining meals so you can pack what you don’t need.

ONE WEEK:

- Discontinue delivery services, such as the newspaper.
- Clean and sort items in garage and attic.
- Clean out your safety-deposit box and place all valuables and documents together. Either carry them with you or send them ahead by registered, insured mail.
- Pack luggage. Set aside items you will need immediately upon arrival — a few dishes, pots and pans, towels, soap, bedding, light bulbs, flashlights, and toilet paper.
- Leave forwarding address with apartment manager or new tenant.

MOVING DAY:

- Reconfirm your delivery date with your mover and provide directions to your new residence.
- Pay close attention to the mover’s paperwork. You will need to sign it upon completion of loading.
- Supervise the movers to make sure your instructions are understood.
- Double-check residence for forgotten items before leaving.
24 THINGS TO DO IN YOUR FIRST 30 DAYS

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO GET ESTABLISHED, MAKE CONNECTIONS, AND FEEL AT HOME

1. **FIRST THINGS FIRST: MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS.** Research shows that knowing the people who live around you is good for both your physical and mental health. Don’t wait for your neighbors to come to you—be your own welcome wagon.

2. **READ UP ON TEXAS AND DFW LAWS** that could impact you. See our list on page 172.

3. **GET YOUR VEHICLE INSPECTED.** Texas requires an annual state vehicle safety and emissions inspection. Many mechanic shops, gas stations, and oil change locations offer these inspections. Find one near you at txdps.state.tx.us/rsd/vi/vlactestationlocator. Be sure to take your proof of insurance.

4. **GET YOUR VEHICLE REGISTRATION STICKER AND LICENSE PLATES.** You can do this at your county tax assessor-collector’s office. You’ll need to show proof of ownership, such as registration or title from your previous home state, as well as proof of insurance and vehicle inspection.

5. **APPLY FOR A TEXAS DRIVER’S LICENSE** at the Texas Department of Public Safety office in your area. To find the location nearest you, go to txdps.state.tx.us or call 512-424-2600.

6. If you’re going to commute to work via public transportation, **FIND YOUR NEAREST DART (OR TRE) STATION OR BUS STOPS** and plot your route. See our map on page 158 for routes. Buy passes and do a test ride.

7. If you’ll commute by car, **MAP OUT FIRST AND SECONDARY ROUTES.** If toll roads are in your future, get a TollTag. See the Access section for toll road maps and TollTag info. Test your routes.

8. **DRIVE OTHER ROADS, TOO.** DFW is a big place, and it can be difficult to budget for traffic. As you have time, pick a neighborhood that is not your own and drive to it. Do it a couple of times during different parts of the day. Then challenge yourself to get there and back home without using GPS. This will help you orient yourself to the area and make life easier when you need to get somewhere out of your comfort zone.

9. **PRINT OUT EMERGENCY NUMBERS.** Such as fire, ambulance, police, etc. Program these numbers into your phone as well. We have a list for you in this section, pages 167-169.

10. **LOCATE THE HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM NEAREST YOUR HOME.** See our hospital’s map in the Living section on page 112. Take a test drive to determine the fastest route before you need it. Likewise, find the nearest urgent care center to your home and office—and review your health insurance policy to discover what it covers.

11. **FIND A NEW DOCTOR.** Find a new dentist. Find a new hairdresser. Find a guy to fix your car when it breaks. Having the people you will need in place before you need them is peace of mind. We think the best way to do this is to ask neighbors and co-workers for referrals.

12. **IF YOU HAVE KIDS, REGISTER THEM IN SCHOOL.** If they’ll be walking to school, map out their route and do a test run. If they’ll be taking the bus, find out the schedules and routes. If school has already started, arrange a parent-teacher conference to start things off right.

13. If you have a dog, **SCOUT OUT DOG PARKS.** We’ve got a map for you in the Living section on page 108. Ask around for a veterinarian referral or check out a vet’s office close to your home. Locate the all-night emergency vet clinic in your neighborhood.

14. **GET UP TO SPEED ON CURRENT LOCAL NEWS.** Subscribe to the newspaper or a community magazine, or bookmark the related websites. Check your cable television channels for local news stations and program your radio with your favorites.

15. **READ UP ON OUR PAST.** The Internet can help you do this.

16. **JOIN A GYM** near your home or office. It’s a good way to meet people and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Alternatively, you may want to join a club, professional organization, or special interest group. DFW has an abundance of running clubs, book clubs, car clubs, environmental groups, theater troupes, and more. You’re sure to find something that suits your interests.

17. If you’re keen on local politics, **ATTEND A TOWN HALL MEETING.** We’ve got a list of local government offices, pages 167-169, in this section. Call the one in your community and ask about open meetings or visit their website.

18. **REGISTER TO VOTE** and locate your polling place. Go to votexas.org or dallascountyvoters.org for information.

19. **GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW CO-WORKERS.** Join an after-work happy hour or ask someone to lunch or coffee.

20. If religion is an important part of your life, **EXPLORE THE CHURCHES, TEMPLES, MOSQUES, OR SYNAGOGUES** in Dallas-Fort Worth. Our area has a plentiful and diverse selection of places to worship, so if your first selection isn’t the right fit, there’s likely another choice just around the corner.

21. **GET OUTSIDE.** DFW has a lot to offer an outdoors enthusiast. Check out our Living section pages 105-110 for hiking trails, cycling paths, running trails, lakes, parks, and more.

22. **SUPPORT THE HOME TEAM.** Whatever your interest—football, basketball, baseball, hockey—we’ve got game. See our map and a list of upcoming events in the Living section on page 97. It’s also fun to connect with your college alumni group so you can support your own teams. It’s a good way to meet people with a background similar to yours and feel more at home.

23. **VOLUNTEER.** It’s good to give back, but helping out in your new community is also a great way to meet like-minded people. See resources for those interested in volunteering with area charities in this section.

24. **GET SOME SLEEP.** Moving is stressful. Take care of yourself.

**PHOTO BY WES WILKES VIA SHUTTERSTOCK**
When you move to Texas, you won’t pay a personal income tax at the state or local level. You also won’t pay a local occupation tax or local wage tax. This means more money in your paycheck. Instead, you pay for local government services, such as education, through local property taxes, sales taxes, and business taxes. It’s a balance, to be sure, but for people who are moving to DFW from high-income-tax states, this change can feel like a financial windfall.

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### SAMPLE TAX INFORMATION FOR DFW COMMUNITIES

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<td>972-775-3481</td>
<td>cemidlothian.org</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murphy Economic Development Corporation</td>
<td>972-468-4030</td>
<td>murphytx.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central Texas Council of Governments</td>
<td>817-840-3300</td>
<td>nccqog.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Richland Hills, City of</td>
<td>817-427-6060</td>
<td>nrhtx.org</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pantego Economic Development Corporation</td>
<td>817-617-3705</td>
<td>townofpantego.com</td>
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<td>Pilot Point, City of</td>
<td>940-886-2165</td>
<td>cityofpilotpoint.org</td>
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<td>Plano Economic Development Corporation</td>
<td>972-206-8300</td>
<td>planotexas.org</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of Plano</td>
<td>972-941-7000</td>
<td>plano.gov</td>
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<tr>
<td>Princeton, City of</td>
<td>972-734-2416</td>
<td>princetontx.gov</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prosper, Town of</td>
<td>972-346-3502</td>
<td>prosperedc.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quad Cities DFW</td>
<td>817-281-9376</td>
<td>netarrant.org</td>
</tr>
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<td>Red Oak, City of</td>
<td>972-617-3638</td>
<td>redoaktx.org</td>
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<td>Richardson Economic Development Corporation</td>
<td>972-792-2800</td>
<td>telecomoilcorpor.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roanoke, City of</td>
<td>817-491-2411</td>
<td>roanoketexas.com</td>
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<td>Rockwall Economic Development Corporation</td>
<td>972-772-0025</td>
<td>rockwall.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowlett, City of</td>
<td>972-463-2498</td>
<td>rowlett.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royse City</td>
<td>972-524-4700</td>
<td>roysecity.com</td>
</tr>
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<td>Sachse Economic Development Corporation</td>
<td>972-675-0562</td>
<td>sachseedc.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saginaw, City of</td>
<td>817-232-4640</td>
<td>saginawtx.us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanger, City of</td>
<td>940-458-7702</td>
<td>sangertexas.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seagoville Economic Development Corporation</td>
<td>972-287-9944</td>
<td>seagovilleedc.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sherman Economic Development Corporation</td>
<td>903-868-2568</td>
<td>sedco.org</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Southlake, City of
- Phone: 817-748-8400
- Website: cityofsouthlake.com

### Sunnyvale, City of
- Phone: 972-226-7177
- Website: townofsunnyvale.org

### Terrell Chamber of Commerce
- Phone: 972-563-5703
- Website: terreltexas.com

### The Colony Economic Development Corporation
- Phone: 972-624-3127
- Website: thecolonyedc.org

### Trophy Club, Town of
- Phone: 817-534-4600
- Website: citryoftrophyclub.org

### Watauga, City of
- Phone: 817-514-5813
- Website: cowtx.org

### Weatherford ED Authority
- Phone: 817-594-9429, ext. 102
- Website: ci.weatherford.tx.us

### Westlake, Town of
- Phone: 817-450-5720
- Website: westlake-tx.org

### Wilmer, City of
- Phone: 972-441-3574

### Wylie, Development Corp.
- Phone: 972-442-7901
- Website: wylieedc.com

### DFW AREA APPRAISAL DISTRICTS
- Collin County Appraisal District
  - Phone: 469-742-9200
  - Website: collincad.org
- Dallas County Appraisal District
  - Phone: 214-631-0910
  - Website: dallascad.org
- Delta County Appraisal District
  - Phone: 903-395-4118
  - Website: delta-cad.org
- Denton County Appraisal District
  - Phone: 940-349-3800
  - Website: dentoncad.com
- Ellis Central Appraisal District
  - Phone: 972-937-3552
  - Website: elliscad.com
- Hunt County Appraisal District
  - Phone: 903-408-4000
  - Website: hctax.info
- Johnson County Central Appraisal District
  - Phone: 817-648-3000
  - Website: johnsoncad.com
- Kaufman County Appraisal District
  - Phone: 972-932-6081
  - Website: kaufman-cad.org
- Parker County Appraisal District
  - Phone: 817-596-0077
  - Website: parkercad.org
- Rockwall Central Appraisal District
  - Phone: 972-771-2034
  - Website: rockwallcad.com
- Tarrant County Appraisal District
  - Phone: 817-284-0024
  - Website: tad.org
- Wise County Appraisal District
  - Phone: 940-627-3081
  - Website: appraisaldistrict.net/countyappraisal.asp?county=wise

### Dallas County
- Agricultural Extension Service
  - Phone: 972-231-5362
- County Commissioners Court
  - Phone: 214-653-7361
- County General Information
  - Phone: 214-653-7475
- County Judge
  - Phone: 214-653-7555
- County Taxes
  - Phone: 214-653-7811
- County Welfare
  - Phone: 214-819-1800, ext. 1801
- District Attorney
  - Phone: 214-653-3600
- Health Department
  - Phone: 214-819-2000
- Immunizations
  - Phone: 214-819-2000
- Justice Center (Inmate Affairs)
  - Phone: 214-761-9025
- Marriage License
  - Phone: 214-853-7039
- Vital Statistics/Records
  - Phone: 214-670-3248
- Voter Registration
  - Phone: 214-819-6389

### City of Dallas
- Emergency
  - Phone: 911
- Animal Control
  - Phone: 311
- Building Inspection
  - Phone: 214-948-4480
- Chamber of Commerce
  - Phone: 214-746-6600
- City Council
  - Phone: 214-670-4050
- City Manager
  - Phone: 214-670-3296
- Civil Service Board
  - Phone: 214-670-3748
- Controller
  - Phone: 214-670-3538
- Dallas City Services
  - Phone: 311
- Dallas Convention Center
  - Phone: 214-939-2724

### Dallas Police Department / Jack Evans Police Headquarters
- Phone: 214-671-3001

### Dallas Public Library
- Phone: 214-670-1400

### DFW Airport
- Phone: 972-973-8888

### Emergency Preparedness
- Phone: 214-670-4275

### Garbage Collection
- Phone: 214-670-8113

### Environmental & Health Services
- Phone: 214-670-3092

### Love Field Airport
- Phone: 214-670-6073

### Mayor’s Office
- Phone: 214-670-4054

### Court & Detention Services
- Phone: 214-670-0109

### Park and Recreation
- Phone: 214-670-4100

### Taxes
- Phone: 214-631-0910

### Tree Trimming (for trees too close to power lines), TXU
- Phone: 972-791-2888

### Visitor Information Center
- Phone: 214-571-1000

### Zoning
- Phone: 214-948-4480

### TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE
- Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS)
  - Phone: 800-525-5555
  - Website: txdps.state.tx.us
- Dallas Courtesy Patrol
  - Phone: 214-653-3465
  - Website: dallascounty.org/department/sheriff/courtesy_patrol.php
- Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART)
  - Phone: 214-749-2662
  - Website: dart.org
- North Texas Tollway Authority
  - Phone: 214-461-2000
  - Website: ntta.org
- NTTA Roadside Assistance
  - Phone: 972-444-4357

### DFW WORKFORCE BOARDS
- Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas
  - Phone: 888-548-9675
  - Website: dfwjobs.com
- Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County
  - Phone: 817-413-4000
  - Website: workforcesolutions.net
- Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas
  - Phone: 214-421-2460
  - Website: wfsdallas.com

### HUMAN SERVICES AND SPECIAL NEEDS
- American Cancer Society
  - Phone: 800-227-2345
- American Red Cross – Dallas
  - Phone: 214-678-4800
- American Red Cross – Fort Worth
  - Phone: 817-335-9137
- Arthritis Foundation
  - Phone: 800-283-7800
- Austin Street Shelter
  - Phone: 214-428-4242
- Callier Center for Communications Disorders – UT Dallas
  - Phone: 214-905-3000
- Cancer Care Services
  - Phone: 817-921-0653
- Catholic Charities
  - Phone: 214-638-4997
- Child Care Associates
  - Phone: 817-838-0055
- Dallas Life Foundation
  - Phone: 214-421-1380
- Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind
  - Phone: 214-821-2375
- Dallas Urban League
  - Phone: 214-413-1760
- Deaf Action Center
  - Phone: 214-521-0407
- Down Syndrome Guild
  - Phone: 214-267-1374
- Easter Seals Greater Northwest Texas
  - Phone: 817-332-7171
- ECI of Richardson
  - Phone: 972-705-5291
- Goodwill Industries of Dallas
  - Phone: 214-638-2800
- Goodwill Industries of Fort Worth
  - Phone: 817-332-7866
- Greater Dallas Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
  - Phone: 214-528-8600
- Hope Cottage Pregnancy and Adoption Center
  - Phone: 214-521-4673
**Mental Health America of Greater Dallas** 214-828-4192

**Mental Health Association of Tarrant County** 817-335-5405

**Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)** 877-275-6233

**North Dallas Shared Ministries** 972-620-8696

**Poison Center** 800-222-1222

**Rape Crisis Center Dallas** 972-641-7273

**Recovery Resource Council (Alcoholism & Drug Abuse)** 817-332-6329

**The Salvation Army** 214-424-7200

**Suicide & Crisis Center of North Texas** 214-828-1000

**The ARC of Dallas** 214-634-9810

**The ARC of Greater Tarrant County** 817-877-1474

**The Bridge Emergency Youth Services** 817-335-4673

**The Women’s Center of Tarrant County** 817-924-9572

**Union Gospel Mission** 214-637-6117

**United Cerebral Palsy of Metropolitan Dallas** 800-999-1898

**United Way of Metropolitan Dallas** 214-978-0000

**Youth Crisis and Runaway Hotline** 800-621-4000 (24 hours)

**Dallas County Dental Society** 972-386-5741

**Dallas County Medical Society** 214-948-3622

**DFW Hospital Council** 972-719-4900

**Health Industry Council of DFW** 972-256-2291

**Tarrant County Medical Society** 817-732-2825

**United Way of Tarrant County** 817-258-8000

**Visiting Nurse Association** 214-905-6053

**Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau** visitdallas.com

**Dallas Morning News** dallasnews.com

**Dallas Police Department** dallaspolice.net

**Fort Worth Convention & Visitors Bureau** fortworth.com

**Fort Worth Police Department** fortworthpd.com

**Fort Worth Star-Telegram** star-telegram.com

**DFW CONSULATES**
- Canada: 214-922-9806
- France: 214-953-0100 ext. 105
- Germany: 214-748-4915 / 214-752-3684
- Iceland: 214-272-2363
- Japan: 972-713-8683
- Mexico: 214-932-8670
- Republic of Korea: 972-701-0108
- Romania: 214-522-3799
- Slovak Republic: 214-251-8020
- South Africa: 214-943-1068
- Spain: 214-373-1200
- Sweden: 972-991-8013
- Switzerland: 214-965-1025
- Taiwan: 972-436-4242
- Thailand: 214-934-0022 ext. 2204
- Tunisia: 972-227-4119
- Uganda: 972-387-7860 ext. 13
- United Kingdom: 214-978-8930
GETTING THE LAY OF THE LAND

Start talking to people about Dallas, and you’ll quickly realize there’s more here than just the city of Dallas. The official North Texas metropolitan area comprises 13 counties and more than 9,300 square miles, making it the largest land-locked metropolitan area in the United States.

With more than 200 cities in the Dallas-Fort Worth region, there is the perfect community for everyone. Each community has its own personality, places of worship, schools, entertainment options, and more. Finding the part of town that makes the most sense for you just takes a little time. With a bit of guidance and patience, you’ll find a place that works for you, whether you are looking for an urban apartment as a single person with a pet or a spacious address in the suburbs for your family of five.

The Communities section, in the front of this magazine, breaks down Dallas neighborhoods, the suburbs, and outlying areas.
Laws vary from state to state, city to city. Here are a few important laws that may be different in Texas and/or the area you plan to live in.

**DRIVING LAWS**

**DRIVER’S LICENSE**

You have 90 days to obtain a Texas driver’s license after moving to the state. If you are over 18 and already have a valid, unexpired license from another state, you won’t have to take the driving or knowledge test. To obtain your new Texas license you must:

- Submit an application to your local Department of Public Safety
- Provide proof of Texas residency
- Submit a valid form of ID, such as a passport, unexpired military ID card, or U.S. Citizen Identification Card
- Pay a $25 fee

**VEHICLE INSURANCE**

In Texas, you are required to have liability car insurance. It’s OK if your auto insurance was issued by another state, but it will have to meet the minimum coverage requirement. In Texas, all drivers must have at least $25,000 in coverage for property damage, $30,000 for each injured person, and $60,000 for injuries per incident.

**VEHICLE INSPECTION**

Vehicle inspections are still a part of the registration process and are performed at Official Vehicle Inspection Stations licensed by the Texas Department of Public Safety. Inspections must be done with 90 days of registering your vehicle. Emission testing is required in 17 Texas counties which must comply with federally mandated clear air requirements.

**VEHICLE REGISTRATION**

In 2013, the State of Texas changed the vehicle inspection and registration requirements, eliminating the inspection sticker. Residents must have their vehicle inspected within 90 days of renewing the state vehicle registration sticker. Under the one-sticker system, it now serves as both the inspection and registration sticker. You can register your vehicle online, by mail, or in person.

**HELMETS**

Texas does not require drivers or passengers of motorcycles to wear helmets. The state also does not require helmets for bicyclists. However, city regulations vary on the latter, and the city of Dallas requires helmets for bicyclists ages 17 and younger.

For more on driving laws, go to dmv.org/tx-texas/safety-laws.php

**GUN LAWS**

**LEGALITY**

There are no legal restrictions to purchasing a gun in Texas. You do not need to obtain a license to own a firearm or register a firearm that you own. It is legal to carry a shotgun or a rifle without having a handler’s license. Handguns can be carried in some places without a Texas Concealed Handgun License (CHL).

**LICENSING**

You may carry a concealed handgun in most places in Texas if you have a CHL, but you must carry the CHL with you. Texas has reciprocity agreements with 30 states. However, there are some places and circumstances you cannot carry a handgun legally even with a CHL. Owners of any establishment can prohibit handguns on their properties if they post a legal notice.

For more on Texas gun laws, go to txdps.state.tx.us/rsd/chl

**LABOR LAWS**

**RIGHT TO WORK**

Texas is a right-to-work state. That means you cannot be denied employment for participation or nonparticipation in a labor union/organization. Your employer cannot discriminate against you for choosing to join or not join a union. Texas is also an employment-at-will state, which means the employer or employee can terminate employment at any time, for any reason, with few exceptions.

For more information on labor laws, go to texasattorneygeneral.gov/agency/righttowork.shtml

**SMOKING AND DRINKING LAWS**

**USE/PURCHASE OF TOBACCO**

You must be older than 18 years of age to purchase tobacco products in Texas.

**SMOKING RESTRICTIONS**

Smoking is not allowed in public places in Dallas, including city parks, libraries, buses, or within 15 feet of any pedestrian entrance. The city of Dallas has also banned smoking in bars and restaurants. However, many of the surrounding communities do allow smoking in bars.

**DRINKING RESTRICTIONS**

The legal age to purchase and consume alcohol in Texas is 21. In Texas, driving with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08 percent or higher is considered driving while intoxicated (DWI). It is illegal in Texas to have open containers of alcohol in the passenger area of your vehicle while you are driving or parked on a public highway.

**DRY VERSUS WET AREAS**

A wet area is one in which sales of all alcoholic beverages are permitted at all times. A dry area is one in which some or all alcoholic beverage sales are restricted some or all the time. There are also partially wet areas in which beer and wine sales are legal, but the sale of liquor is not. DFW is a complicated patchwork of all of the above.

**MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE LAWS**

**MARRIAGE/DIVORCE REQUIREMENTS**

To get married in Texas, you need to be at least 18 years old. Apply in person at a Texas County Clerk’s Office to receive your marriage license. Texas is a no-fault divorce state; meaning you do not have to prove wrongdoing to be granted a divorce. Texas does not stipulate that a couple must be separated for any period of time prior to getting a divorce.

**COMMON LAW MARRIAGE**

Texas recognizes common-law marriage. You and your partner simply need to either file a Declaration of Informal Marriage or agree that you are married, live together in Texas, and represent to other people that you are married to each other.

**DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIPS**

As of the summer of 2015, the State of Texas recognizes marriage, civil unions, and domestic partnerships between individuals of the same gender, per the U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

For more on marriage and divorce, go to dshs.state.tx.us/Vital_Statistics/Verification_of_a_Marriage_or_Divorce.aspx

**EDUCATION LAWS**

**KINDERGARTEN**

Texas does not require kindergarten. However, children ages 6 and over must attend school.

**TESTING**

Texas requires students to take standardized tests in grades 3-8 and high school end-of-course (EOC) exams. The tests are called the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) system. The number of EOC tests a student is required to take depends on what that student plans to do after graduation.

For more on public education in Texas, go to tasb.org/legislative/documents/fullguide.pdf and see the Education section of this guide (beginning on page 130).

**REAL ESTATE**

**HOMESTEAD LAW**

The Texas Homestead Exemption reduces taxes by lowering a home’s taxable value. All school districts offer a $15,000 homestead exemption, and some taxing units offer a separate exemption based on a percentage of a home’s assessed value. The homestead exemption applies only if the property is the owner’s primary residence. There are additional exemptions for people over 65. Also under the Texas Homestead Exemption your residence is protected from the forced sale by creditors, with the exception of the lender, the IRS, or a contractor who works on your house and increases its value. When you buy a house, call the county appraisal district and ask for the forms for declaring your homestead.

For more on the homestead exemption, go to comptroller.texas.gov/taxinfo/proptax/exemptions.html