

How to Choose a Professional Mover

Has a moving company ever asked you for a cash deposit before your move? Was the company's Web site missing a local address or licensing information? You could have been a target of a growing problem – "rogue movers" – who can turn the stressful event of moving into a complete disaster.

Unfortunately, many moving scams have been tied to the increased usage of the Internet by consumers planning a move. More and more consumers are going online to find a moving company and basing their choices primarily on cost with little regard to a company's record or reputation. As a result, an ever-growing number of people are being scammed by unscrupulous "rogue movers," who aren't licensed or insured movers; some are even "companies" without real operations. The Internet provides these companies with the opportunity to present themselves as being more established than they really are.

United van Lines, one of the world's largest and most recognized names in moving, has compiled a list of tips to help consumers choose a professional mover during this busy moving season, when more than 43 million people will pack up and move their belongings to a new home.

Planning ahead can help reduce the possibility of problems in what is a very detail-driven event. By following these steps in choosing your mover, you are more likely to have a safer, easier and more cost-effective transition.

Where To Start

- Begin your search for a mover by **asking your friends**, relatives and business associates about movers they have used and liked.
- Use the phone book or **contact a real estate agent** to find at least three moving companies that have real offices (i.e., real addresses) in your area.
- If you are using the Yellow Pages, remember: just because a moving company has a large ad doesn't necessarily mean it is reputable.
- Once you've made a list of prospects, contact the companies via phone to get the **full company name and "doing business as" names**, the number of years in business, address and phone numbers, Web site and e-mail addresses, references and DOT and MC license numbers.

- You can check with the Better Business Bureau or other consumer organizations in your local area.

Getting Estimates

- **Don't rely on a quote provided sight-unseen over the phone or over the Internet.** When moving long distance, your charge is based on the actual weight of your shipment and where you are moving from and to.. You are better off meeting face-to-face with the mover's representative to ensure that you both understand what is involved.
- During the on-site estimate, be sure to **show the representative everything** that is to be moved. Don't forget about the items in the basement or the major piece of furniture you have sent away for repairs. Don't be afraid to ask questions. The salesperson should also ask you questions – about your new home, the timing of your move, etc.
- **Inquire about "valuation" options.** Valuation provides protection from loss or damage to your possessions. The valuation option you choose determines the basis upon which any claim will be adjusted and the maximum liability of the mover. The liability of a mover for loss or damage is based upon the mover's tariffs, as well as federal laws and regulations, and has certain limitations and exclusions. Valuation is not insurance; it is simply a tariff-based level of motor carrier liability.
- Be wary of quotes that are **substantially lower than the rest.** "Low-ball" price quotes could result in significantly lower-quality service, or they could be an indication of a mover who plans to "up" the price in a moving scam. One of the many horror stories shared by victims of moving fraud involves a rogue mover taking household goods "hostage" and demanding large sums of money – sometimes thousands of dollars – before returning the possessions. (In these cases, the mover often gives the customer a low bid, then ups the price once the goods are on the truck.)

Go With a Name You Know

- There are plenty of quality "name" van lines to choose from. If you have never heard of a particular mover and you have no references from friends or business associates, be very careful! **Don't be swayed by a super-low price from an unknown firm;** remember, you're entrusting your mover with almost all of your personal possessions.

Choosing From Among Similar Estimates

- **References are important.** If a mover wasn't recommended by someone you know, ask for the names and phone numbers of satisfied customers. Then call them!
- Consider the **attentiveness of the salesperson.** Do you have confidence that he or she will be there to help you through planning, packing and loading?
- **Take a drive past the mover's office or warehouse.** Does it reflect the level of quality and professionalism you expect in a service provider?
- **The "110% Rule".** The rule states that under a non-bonding estimate, the mover cannot require you to pay more than the amount of the original estimate, plus 10 percent, at the time of delivery. You are obligated to pay any remaining charges over the 110 percent amount, within 30 days.

Timing is Important

- Make arrangements for your move well in advance – at least **four to six weeks before the moving date.** If at all possible, try not to move when everyone else wants to move. Throughout the year, the end of the month is a busy time for movers, because of the expiration of leases and preferred closing dates. The summer months – May to mid-September, when children are out of school – are "peak season" for movers. Schedule summertime moves as far in advance as possible...and again, try to stay away from month-end moving dates.