

Before you hire a mover:

Top 10 recommendations to help you enjoy a good move

With nearly 4 out of 5 families moving each year, there's a good chance that you may be among those embarking on a new adventure. Moving can be a daunting task, but the professional moving and storage industry can help you every step of the way.

1. **NEVER HIRE A MOVER OVER THE INTERNET!!** That's where the bad guys are. You might be promised a cheap price on the internet, but there are too many risks and the promise is easily broken once they have your goods on their truck and your credit card number in their hands. Craig's List and other internet sites are dangerous places to shop for a mover. Remember, you're buying a service, not a product.
2. **Remember that prices too good to be true probably are.** Legitimate business people have legitimate expenses, such as license, taxes, insurance, employee wages, benefits, and quality equipment. A legitimate mover must consider all those things when determining the price for service, and so should you. Remember, you typically get what you pay for. Too-cheap prices for moving service can cost you plenty in terms of loss and damage, frustration, fear, hostage shipments, or worse.
3. **Don't wait until the last minute!** You should begin your search at least 6 weeks in advance of the time you wish to move. Especially during the busy summer season, good movers book up early. If at all possible, avoid the first and last weeks of the month for your move. That's when everyone else wants to move, too!
4. **Do your homework!**
 - Just because you read something on the internet doesn't make it true.
 - An attractive ad in the Yellow Pages doesn't make a company legitimate.
 - Never, ever, do business with a company that shows only a phone number that you found on a bulletin board or Craig's List. Most of those phone numbers are cell phones and are absolutely untraceable if you need to track down the bandit after he's scammed you.
 - Stop by (unannounced) to see their place of business. Look at their equipment and buildings. Are they clean and well maintained? This is particularly important if you're placing your goods into storage. How about the employees? Are they neat and clean? Are they answering your questions or giving you the bum's rush? Observe moves in progress -- are the movers careful with the property they're loading? Are they efficient?
 - Check all the facts before you hire a mover. Contact regulatory agencies and your state mover's association to check on the mover's license status and complaint history.

Remember, you're entrusting all your worldly goods to the care of these people. Is your instinct a good one?

5. Make sure your mover is licensed! A specific, specialty license helps guarantee the mover:

- has all the appropriate insurance (you want more than just the driver's car insurance),
- is accountable to the authorities, and
- is a trustworthy business with an investment in the community.

For moves within Illinois, movers must be licensed by the Illinois Commerce Commission. If you are moving interstate (across state lines), be sure the mover is licensed by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. If you're moving in a state outside Illinois, contact the state mover's association for assistance. Ask friends, relatives, and business colleagues about movers they have used and liked, but still be sure to check the licensing and complaint status. (See the resource list at the end of this article.)

6. Get everything in writing! Require the mover to visit your home to provide a free written estimate.

Phone quotes and on-line estimates are prescriptions for problems on move day, no matter how nice the sales person may sound on the telephone or how detailed you may think the on-line estimate is. For an accurate estimate, show the estimator the contents of every room, closet, attic, cellar, or garage so he or she can accurately gauge your requirements. Discuss what your new home will be like, including elevators, staircases, low-hanging trees, parking restrictions, etc. Surprising the crew with extras on moving day only leads to confusion and possible delay. The mover won't just "throw in" the extra "stuff" for free.

It's usually a good idea to get estimates from three different companies. When comparing estimates, don't begin by looking at the price. First look at the basic details of the move (crew size, estimated hours, weight of your goods etc.). Those details should be very similar on all three estimates. Consider the price last. If one estimate's details or price is significantly lower than the other two, don't presume that will be the cheapest move, because most likely it won't be! Ask more questions.

Depending upon your location (such as within Illinois), state regulations may not allow a flat price or binding estimate. A written estimate will give you a reasonable expectation of what you will be required to pay on moving day, and a professional mover will be happy to visit you in your home and answer all your questions. Check with your state regulatory agency to find out more about your options.

7. What about discounts? For residential moves within Illinois, a mover is not allowed to give you a discount except on certain limited local moves; and many other states have the same regulation. Movers' rates must be published in their tariff, and the mover is required to provide you with a copy of the tariff upon request. If the mover is offering you a lot of "freebies" (such as cartons, tape, etc.) just to get your move, ask questions. Unless the "freebies" are included in the tariff, the mover could well be required to bill you later.

8. Be sure to discuss your options for loss and damage protection, and make sure you understand what the mover is telling you. Because everyone has different needs, your property is not automatically covered for loss or damage in the basic transportation rate. Ask questions, and get everything in writing.

9. How must you pay? Find out in advance if you'll be required to pay by cashier's check, money order, or cash. Not all moving companies accept personal checks or credit cards. Most legitimate moving companies do not require an advance deposit. In fact, deposits are usually red flags warning you to do more serious research before hiring that particular mover. Remember that on moving day you must be prepared to pay 110% of the written estimate, and the mover may not withhold your household goods if you pay the amount of the written estimate (plus 10% if the estimate was too low). You'll have 30 days to pay the balance due. Depending upon your location (such as within Illinois), state regulations may not allow a flat price or binding estimate. Check with your state regulatory agency to find out more about your options.

10. What about storage? If your mover is taking custody of your property to place it into storage for you, be sure you know specifically where their warehouse is. Visit the warehouse. Are they taking good care of other customers' property? Is the warehouse licensed? (In Illinois a separate license is required, and the warehouse is inspected.) **Be sure to receive a storage contract/warehouse receipt**, which will include the specific location where your goods will be stored, a detailed inventory of your goods, specify the storage rate, loss and damage protection, etc. A good warehouseman will not suggest long-term storage of your property in an unused trailer, because the risk of loss or damage is too great (it's also against the law in Illinois). *Never allow a mover to place your goods in a self-storage (mini warehouse) or public storage facility in the mover's name.* The contract must be in YOUR name, and YOU hold the key. If the mover doesn't have a licensed warehouse (in his/her own name), it is against the law to provide storage service.

While we never recommend hiring your mover over the internet, the world wide web does provide some excellent research tools to help you qualify which mover is the right one for you.

www.icc.illinois.gov is the Illinois Commerce Commission, which regulates moves within the state of Illinois. The site includes a complaint database and list of all movers licensed in Illinois.

www.protectyourmove.gov is the consumer site of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the regulatory agency for interstate movers. The site includes consumer tips, a complaint database, and list of all movers with a federal moving license.