

## **Don't be scammed!**

### **Top 10 Recommendations to Consumers**

- 1. Research to determine if the mover you are considering is properly licensed for the type of service you need.**
  - Intrastate (within Illinois) movers must be licensed by the Illinois Commerce Commission.
  - If you're putting your property into storage, be sure the company holds a current license from the Illinois Commerce Commission. CAUTION: Do not allow a mover to place your property into a self-storage facility unless the contract with the facility is in YOUR name and you hold the key. (See #9 below.)
  - If you are moving interstate (across state lines), be sure the mover is licensed specifically for household goods moving by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.
- 2. Do not choose your mover from the Internet.** On-line shopping may be ok for buying shoes, but not for hiring your moving service. Use the internet to begin your research, but then, for your protection, follow through with more detailed interviewing and complaints checking before hiring.
  - Ask friends, relatives, and business colleagues about movers they have used and liked. Be careful about relying only on references provided by the mover (would they provide a bad reference?).
  - Contact your mover's association and regulatory agency to check on the mover's complaint history.
  - Never, ever, do business with a company that only advertises a phone number. 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?
  - **Remember, you're entrusting all your worldly goods to the care of these people. Is your instinct a good one?**
- 3. Require the mover to visit your home to provide a written estimate.** Phone and on-line estimates are prescriptions for misunderstanding and problems on move day, and more complaints result from phone and on-line estimates than anything else. Be sure to tell your mover everything you intend to move. For your estimate to be accurate, show the estimator the contents of every room, closet, attic, cellar, or garage so he or she can accurately gauge your requirements, and talk about what to expect at your new home. Are there low-hanging trees? Steep driveways? Surprising the crew on moving day can only lead to confusion and possible delay. The mover won't just "throw in" the extra "stuff" at no charge. A written estimate is not a binding quote, but it will give you a reasonable expectation of what you will be required to pay on moving day.
- 4. 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 on the written estimate (plus 10% if the estimate was too low). You'll have 30 days to pay the balance due. **Do not use a debit card to pay.** Credit cards give you some protection; but with your debit card number, criminals can quickly drain your bank account.
- 5. Be sure to discuss your options for loss and damage protection,** and make sure you understand what the mover is telling you. Get it in writing.
- 6. 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.
- 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. **Movers' rates must be published in their tariff with the Illinois Commerce Commission.** 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. You have the right to see the mover's tariff.
- 8. Tipping is not required or expected.** If you feel the movers on your job should receive an extra gratuity for a job well done, that's entirely your decision. There is no prescribed amount for a tip; and if the moving crew demands one (that's called extortion), report them to the company immediately.
- 9. 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 the storage will be. Inspect 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 regularly inspected.) **Be sure to receive a storage contract warehouse receipt,** which will include 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 -- the risk of loss or damage is too great (and it is 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.** If the mover doesn't have a licensed warehouse (in his/her own name), it is against the law to be performing warehouse service.
- 10. 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!