



Making the right move

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There is an old saying that "Money isn't everything, but it sure keeps you in touch with the kids." We're a money-concerned society and we're trained to save and to look for the good deal. Unfortunately, that can sometimes be our downfall. Take this scenario: There you are, going to move in to your new home. You've called several known and established moving companies and you've gotten some estimates. They were all in the same ballpark. But, you don't really know if they are the best deal. Then, you happen to see a phone number on the Internet that promises you the lowest moving price. You call them. Sure, enough, the moving company pointed-to, tells you they can move you for 25-percent less than the quotes you've gotten. You jump at the chance.

That's when the nightmare begins. The "mover" loads your stuff in the van, then tells you he needs his quoted charge in advance and he needs it in cash. You begin to think you might have made a mistake, but the mover's already got your furniture and boxes aboard his van and there's nothing you can do. So, you comply. A quick trip to the bank sends the mover on the way to your new digs. You figure, at this point, there will be no problems. Wrong.

When the mover arrives at your new house he announces that he needs "an unloading fee." What's that? The mover explains he's moved your stuff, as promised, "see, its all right there in the truck." But now, there's another fee for unloading it. And, that, too, has got to be in cash! By the time you get through this horror story and your belongings are safely in your

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new house, you realize you've been taken to the proverbial cleaners. You may have paid double or more than what established movers originally quoted you. If you don't pay up, as some angry people are inclined to do, the last they see of their stuff is the truck driving away.

The American Moving and Storage Association, which is engaged in an all-

out war against criminals posing as movers, says if your move was across state lines, you may be able to get Federal enforcement officials to investigate and possibly get your stuff back "but it's a difficult process."

The smart thing to do when you plan to move, says the Association, is question the price, saying, "If the price seems too good to be true, it probably is." And, one of the first things they warn about is

going on line to find a mover, saying the Internet has become "A favorite tool of rogue movers for luring victims." They say that websites may look professional and legitimate, "but recommended movers are unfamiliar." The Association warns, to be safe, "avoid web-based brokers and deal directly with known, well-established movers located in your area or with well-established van lines."

Another important point made by the Association is their warning "Beware of required deposits." They say legitimate movers won't require a deposit except in extraordinary circumstances." Scam movers most often require a deposit, even if you're just moving a few blocks away. "If you are asked for a deposit to hold your dates' or to insure 'prompt service,'" the Association warns, "use another mover." Although legitimate movers won't likely ask for a deposit' the Association is quick to point out, be prepared for the fact that it is normal for them to sometimes ask for payment before unloading your stuff.

It is also true that just as criminals pose as movers, there are a lot of people who try to rip off the movers. For instance, some customers will try to give a check for the charges following an interstate move. Although checks and credit cards are usually acceptable for local or in-state moves, most legitimate movers won't accept checks or credit cards when they take your things to another state. Once the truck has returned to its home state, it's virtually impossible for the mover to collect on a bad check or a cancelled credit card payment. That's why most will not accept personal checks after crossing state lines.

Another thing to beware of is a price based on cubic feet. Legal moving loads are based on shipment weight. The cubic foot scam is a charge, based supposedly, on the cubic feet your goods will take up in the truck. That's obviously a trick where your goods can be loaded on the truck to the mover's advantage. In this



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circumstance, the mover can load his truck loosely and take up a lot of space with not much stuff. "If the price is based on cubic feet," warns the American Moving and Storage Association, "use another mover."

One more important note is to make sure you have an accurate estimate. The rule is: You don't ever want to rely on a phone or Internet estimate. "While some legitimate movers may offer a phone survey," warns the Association, it is better, "to ask them to send a trained, experienced estimator to your home for a more accurate estimate." You don't need any surprises.

When the estimator arrives, you'll want to show him everything that will be moved and that includes things from the attic to the garage, from the closets, and even from under the beds. All too often, many of us promise the mover we'll pack everything, but actually, don't get around to it. If the mover does extra packing, the mover's time and effort will have to be paid for.

Also, make certain you read all the paper work. Federal law requires interstate movers to provide you with a booklet entitled "Your Rights and Responsibilities When You Move." Be sure and read the pamphlet. "If it isn't provided," warns the Association, "choose another mover."

Moving is always a stressful experience. You don't want to complicate it by hiring a rogue mover who'll scam you out of your money. The whole object is to save as much money as you can on

what is usually a large expense. Remember, too, arriving at your new home is a time when you're going to face a lot of unexpected stresses about your new place. That's particularly true, if say, you see the electrician who wired it and he has no eyebrows.

So the moral of the story, says the American Moving and Storage Association, is to be on guard. Know what you're getting into and make sure you make the right move. **IM**