



# CONSUMER NEWS

## SAN DIEGO CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

### HIRING A MOVING COMPANY

June 2010

When hiring a moving company, it is important to make sure the people you are entrusting with your property are trustworthy.

Horror stories abound about moving companies. One common scenario is this: without ever visiting your home or seeing the goods you want moved, the company gives a low price estimate over the phone or internet. Once your goods are on their truck, the moving company demands more money before they will deliver or unload your property. The company holds your property hostage and forces you to pay more to get your goods back.

The best way to protect yourself from rogue moving companies is to do your homework and be prepared *before* calling the movers.

It is important to know that different laws and regulations apply to moving companies

depending on whether the move is made *within* the state of California or from one State to another.

#### *MOVING WITHIN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA*

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) regulates intrastate moving companies—that is companies that perform moves *within* the state of California. These moving companies must be licensed by the CPUC prior to operating.

Before hiring a company for a move within the state of California, first make sure that the company is licensed and authorized to operate. You can check the company's status on the CPUC's website at [www.cpuc.ca.gov](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov). Or consumers can call the CPUC at 1-800-877-8867 to confirm a license status.

#### *MOVING FROM ONE STATE TO ANOTHER*

Moving companies that transport goods interstate—which means from one State to another—are regulated by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). Interstate movers need to be registered with FMCSA before they can operate.

Consumers can check to make sure a mover is registered on the FMCSA website at [www.protectyourmove.gov](http://www.protectyourmove.gov), or by calling 1-800-832-5660.

#### *TIPS TO FOLLOW BEFORE HIRING A MOVING COMPANY*

Once you have made sure a moving company is properly licensed, there are additional steps to take to ensure the business is reputable.

#### *THOROUGHLY RESEARCH THE COMPANY BEFORE HIRING*

Before hiring movers it is important to find out about the company's track record. Find out how long the company has been in operation. When possible, visit a company's place of business. For companies that advertise nationally, ask if there is a local contact person you can deal with. A company that only wants to deal with you over the telephone or internet should raise a red flag. Other "red flags" to look out for:

- The moving company demands cash or a large deposit before the move.
- When you call the mover, the telephone is answered with a generic "Movers" or "Moving company," rather than the company's name.
- The company's website lists no physical address of the business.

Finally, check a moving company's complaint history with the Better Business Bureau. Consumers can check the status of a business online at the BBB website [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org).

***GET AT LEAST TWO WRITTEN ESTIMATES, AND INSIST ON A VISUAL INSPECTION OF THE ITEMS TO BE SHIPPED***

Do not accept verbal estimates given over the phone or internet. Instead, insist upon a visual inspection of the property to be moved. Quotes given over the phone or internet are often lower than the actual price of the move. Verbal estimates are

not binding and may not be enforceable. Make sure estimates are given in writing, and are based on an actual inspection of the goods to be moved.

***DETAIL CONDITION OF ITEMS TO BE MOVED, AND CONSIDER TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS***

Most moving companies will provide a detailed description of the pre-existing damage of each item being moved. If the damage description is unclear or confusing, ask for clarification before items are moved.

It is advisable to take pictures or videotape of items to be shipped. In the event that a dispute arises concerning items that are lost or damaged during a move, it may become important to show the condition of the item before the move.

***MOVING COMPANY MUST PROVIDE YOU WITH A BOOKLET OUTLINING YOUR RIGHTS PRIOR TO THE MOVE***

The laws regulating moving companies are different depending on whether the move is within the state of California or from one State to another. It is the moving company's obligation to provide the consumer with a pamphlet outlining the applicable law prior to the move. The pamphlet has information you will need if your goods are lost or damaged during transit.

It is important to read through the pamphlet to understand your rights. Consumers can also obtain copies of the pamphlets online on government websites. For interstate moves the

booklet, entitled "Your Rights and Responsibilities When You Move," is available at [www.protectyourmove.gov](http://www.protectyourmove.gov).

For intrastate moves within California the pamphlets entitled "Important Information For Persons Moving Household Goods Within California" are available online at [www.cpuc.ca.gov](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov).

***HOW TO FILE COMPLAINTS***

To file a formal complaint against a company moving goods within California, consumers can call the California Public Utilities Commission at 1-800-366-4782, or follow the "File a Complaint" link at [www.cpuc.ca.gov](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov).

For complaints against moving companies that move goods between states contact the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration at 1-888-368-7238, or find complaint forms online at [www.protectyourmove.org](http://www.protectyourmove.org).

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Newsletter written by Kristine Lorenz.

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The information provided in this newsletter is intended to convey general information and is not intended to be relied upon as legal advice.

To report violations of this law and other consumer protection laws, call the City Attorney's Hotline at **(619) 533-5600**.