

Five questions to ask moving companies

Are you moving this month? You're not alone. According to the Census, approximately one in nine people, or about 40 million Americans, move every year. More people move in May than in any other month, according to industry experts.

Whether you're moving into a condo or moving into a rental, you'll want to make sure that the moving company you're using knows what they're doing and will take good care of your possessions during the move. In addition to bad movers, there are plenty of "bad actors," scam artists who pose as movers, so you'll want to take the time to find a moving company you can trust.

Whenever you move, here are five questions to ask moving companies:

1. Are you the mover or are you a moving company broker?

When you search online for a moving company, you may wind up on a website that is run by a moving company broker. While brokers do play a role in attracting moving prospects and then matching them to a moving company, they aren't the company that will give you a binding estimate or with which you'll sign a contract. Moving companies will be responsible for loss or damage, while a broker will not. Finally, brokers are

often compensated for leads they send to a moving company. They could have an incentive to sell your name and information to the company that pays the most rather than only work with legitimate moving companies.

2. Do you give binding quotes?

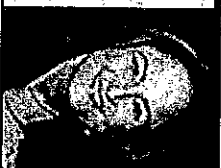
The answer should be "yes." A moving company is able to give a binding quote. That means they can give you a moving cost estimate that will include the phrase "not to exceed" and some amount of money. Typically, movers won't give binding quotes over the phone. They'll need to come out to your home, after reviewing how many rooms (and how much stuff you have in each room) they're moving, they'll provide a written, binding quote. Brokers typically don't provide binding quotes (or any sort of quote you can rely on). However, if you do get a "binding" quote, you better make sure you understand the fine print. Some movers will exaggerate the maximum amount they will charge you, but you should insist on a realistic amount. Otherwise, you could get stuck paying the higher amount.

3. What are the extra moving charges I might encounter?

Moving companies will often try to upsell you on items, like mov-

Real Estate Matters

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ing boxes and packing tape. That's different from extra charges you might encounter because of specific issues with your move. If you are on the top floor of a four-story walk-up, you might pay a higher dollar per hour charge or an extra flat fee. If you're transporting your furnishings across state lines, or across the country, you might have long carry charges or storage charges. There might also be extra fees for moving appliances, parking, fuel for long-haul carries, pianos, heavy stoneware, and artwork.

In addition, if you have extra valuable items that your own homeowners insurance policy won't cover during a move, you'll have to pay for an extra high-value moving insurance policy. The typical insurance policy covers about 60 cents per pound, but you'll

want to know upfront how much it will cost to upgrade that policy. (You can also work with your regular insurance company to make sure your homeowners insurance policy will cover you or buy extra coverage to cover the move, though you may need an appraisal for extremely high-value items.)

Be sure to ask for a written list of additional fees and ask the company to detail during the inspection which ones might, will, can or do apply to your move.

4. Will my belongings stay on the same truck for the whole move?

Every time movers touch your furnishings, there's a possibility of damage and additional time that it will take your movers to care for your belongings. Sometimes items have to be transferred during a move, or you may need two trucks in order to move. Be sure you understand if your belongings will have to change trucks mid-move and who will oversee that transfer. On that note, make sure you hire a mover that has the right truck for your move.

5. What forms of payment are accepted?

If the moving company you call says it only accepts cash, hang up. That may be a sign of trouble. You

want a written, binding estimate, and you want to understand exactly how much is due upfront and how much upon the delivery. Is the deposit refundable? Can you use a credit card? Is there a fee for using a credit card? Do they accept checks? What happens if something is missing or broken? Be sure you understand exactly how you will pay the movers and what liability you will take on if you pack up your belongings instead of the mover packing for you. You want to make sure you hire a mover that won't hold your possessions hostage when you get into a dispute with them over fees or over the form of payment they accept.

(Illyce Glink is the creator of an 18-part webinar+ebook series called "The Intentional Investor: How to be wildly successful in real estate," as well as the author of many books on real estate. She also hosts the "Real Estate Minute," on her YouTube channel. Samuel J. Tankin is a Chicago-based real estate attorney. Contact Illyce and Sam through her website, ThinkGlink.com.)

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