

The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles Smart Buyer Series

Smart Mover

Tips for a Safe and Successful Household Goods Move

Overview

The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) is committed to making Texas consumers smarter when it comes to hiring a moving company for their household goods move. Texas law requires that a mover operating within the State be licensed by both the TxDMV and the U.S Department of Transportation (USDOT). These license numbers must be displayed on moving trucks, printed on online advertisements, and on moving proposals/contracts.

Unfortunately, unlicensed movers operate throughout the state and country. These unlicensed or “rogue” movers exact a tremendous financial and emotional toll on unwary Texas consumers who often find themselves faced with having to pay high additional costs as ransom at the end of the move to recover the consumer’s possessions or risk losing these possessions. In some cases, the consumer’s possessions are simply stolen and never delivered to their destination. Rogue movers will often rely on a “signed contract” to enforce their demands and to try to convince law enforcement that their operations are legitimate. The rogue movers will argue that the dispute between the mover and the consumer is a “civil matter”, and not what is actually happening - criminal fraud.

This information is provided by the TxDMV Enforcement Division to inform consumers of the dangers of dealing with unlicensed rogue movers. We do not want consumers to ever make that call or email contact that results in a unlicensed rogue mover entering your home and loading all of your possessions on to their truck. Once your possessions are on the truck, it is, in most cases, too late. The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles wants you to be a “Smart Mover.” Moving fraud is preventable. Consumers *must* do their homework when looking to hire a moving company. Unlicensed rogue movers will often offer the lowest price. The internet is the preferred way of advertising this “lowest” price. Remember, the unlicensed rogue” mover has one goal: to get your items on their truck.

Legitimate licensed moving companies will have an active TxDMV certificate/license number. The TxDMV has an online database, “Truck Stop”, available on the TxDMV website (www.txdmv.gov) and accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Truck Stop gives you several options on how to search for a mover (Name, TxDMV number, USDOT number, etc.). If you cannot find a moving company in our database, ask the mover you are considering using to give you a copy of their TxDMV number and then check it in the Truck Stop. If the mover hesitates or does not provide a TxDMV number, chances are they are an unlicensed moving company. *Do not use this moving company!*

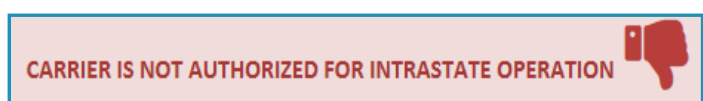
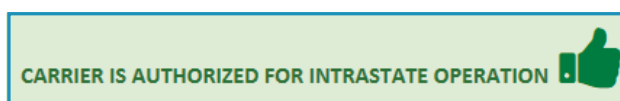
“Red Flags” for Scams. Read the sections below to learn about some of the “red flags” that show a mover might be trying to scam you. Even a licensed mover may engage in unscrupulous business practices to get your business.

- UNREALISTIC LOW PRICED MOVES** - A bad mover’s goal is to first gain your confidence and then gain possession of your household goods. If the deal being offered seems too good to be true, it probably is. Bad movers will advertise an extremely low cost for a move and then increase the price once your items are loaded onto their truck. Remember: Once your household goods are loaded on the truck, you may be in big trouble. All of the terms of the move and the costs should be agreed upon before the first item is taken out of your home.
- GENERIC CONTACT INFORMATION** - Unlicensed movers typically have no local business address, use cell phones as their business phones or answer the phone with vague terms as "Movers" or "Moving Company". Ask questions. Ask the mover to give you their TxDMV certificate number and then check the number in the “Truck Stop” database.
- UNMARKED MOVING TRUCKS** - Unlicensed movers will typically have no markings on their trucks or use rental trucks. TxDMV requires all licensed movers to have their name and TxDMV number on both sides of their trucks (owned or rented) either labeled on the truck or with a magnetic sign.
- NO PAPERWORK** - Movers are required to provide the customer with a proposal/contract **BEFORE** loading your items on their truck. Unlicensed movers may not provide you with either, or may rush you through a “contract” form and make you sign it before reading it. Read both sides of the contract! Always look for the TxDMV number on the paperwork presented and again, verify the number in “Truck Stop.” Never rely on verbal agreements. All terms and costs should be in writing.
- KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES** - All licensed movers are required to provide you with a copy of the TxDMV’s “Rights and Responsibilities” brochure **BEFORE** loading your items. This document is a condensed version explaining your rights under the law of what you can do before, during and after your move occurs. An unlicensed mover will probably not offer you this brochure.
- NO TARIFF ON FILE** - All licensed movers are required to have a list of all their rates and charges on file with TxDMV. This is called a tariff. An unlicensed mover will not have a tariff on file. The tariff can be verified in the TxDMV Truck Stop database.

Go to the Truck Stop

The TxDMV’s “Truck Stop” database is an easy way to verify that a moving company is licensed and may operate as a household goods mover in Texas. An active TxDMV certificate number means the mover has provided proof that they are adequately insured with both liability and cargo insurance.

Truck Stop makes it easy to verify a mover’s license to operate. It is as easy as getting a “thumb up” or a “thumb down”. “Thumb up” means the mover is good to go. The license is active. Insurance requirements have been met. “Thumb down” means you should stop! Do not contract with this mover!



During Your Move

After hiring a licensed mover and agreeing on a price in writing, you can then have the mover begin loading your possessions. The mover is required to provide you with a copy of the contract **BEFORE** loading. Read the contract carefully. **DO NOT RELY ON VERBAL AGREEMENTS.** An agreed upon price can only change after your shipment has been loaded and only if both parties agree in writing. This will happen if both parties agree to amend the original contract in writing. You should make sure to inform the mover of any pickup or delivery deadlines before signing the contract as these requirements may affect the total cost of the move. A mover can't increase the cost of a move unexpectedly. However, a mover can charge for any additional accessory or materials costs associated with the move besides a standard hourly rate. These charges should be explained further in the mover's tariff.

Things to remember during your move:

- If you're packing on your own, pack with appropriate boxes and don't overfill them. Label all boxes with fragile items.
- It's a good idea to keep all valuables separate from the items being transported by the mover. Such items include small musical instruments, jewelry, important documents, and medications.
- If an inventory is conducted, accompany the mover while they take the inventory. Sign and agree to the inventory **BEFORE** and **AFTER** the move. Take photos of items that may already be damaged if the mover does not do so.
- Be available during the move to answer any questions the mover may have or to give further instructions. Failure to do so could end up in additional costs to you.
- Take a final look around after your items are loaded to make sure nothing is left behind.
- Always keep a copy of all moving documents with you. If you witness damage to any of your items during the move, note that damage on your copy of the moving documents and on the mover's copy.

Delivery of Your Items

Supervise the unloading of your items or appoint someone you trust to supervise the unloading. Notify the mover immediately if you discover any damaged items and note the damage on all copies of your Moving Contract. Be prepared to pay the agreed upon maximum amount listed on the written proposal at the time of delivery. After delivery of your items, the mover is required to provide you with a final copy of your Moving Contract, after you and the mover sign and date it, agreeing that the shipment has been delivered.

IMPORTANT: By signing the Moving Contract upon delivery of your shipment, the mover is not released from liability as to any damaged items.

Understanding a Mover's Liability

IMPORTANT: Before the move, you and your mover are authorized to agree to the amount of your mover's liability, if any, for loss of your items or damage to your items. You and the mover could agree that the mover would have no liability to you for loss/damage to your items, or you and your mover could agree to more mover liability. For example, if you and your mover agree to limit the mover's liability to 60 cents per pound per item and the mover damages your 50-pound television as a result of a move, the mover is only required to reimburse you \$30.00 (50 lbs. X 0.60 = \$30.00).

Some movers will assume a higher level of liability for damaged or lost items. However, both parties must agree upon this higher liability before the move begins and the mover is allowed to charge additional fees for this coverage. **THIS IS NOT INSURANCE.**

You, as the shipper, can obtain additional insurance to protect your items. Your best protection on transporting your high value items is to transport them yourself.

After Your Move: Damage Claims

If you have any disputes with your licensed mover about charges, or loss or damage to your items, you must file a written claim with the mover within 90 days of the delivery date. Your claim must include enough information for the mover to investigate your claim along with any specific monetary amounts requested or other solution you are seeking.

Your mover has 23 days to acknowledge your claim in writing and 90 days to make a settlement offer. If your claim involves damaged goods, you should preserve the containers and the damaged goods. The mover has the right to inspect any containers or damaged goods within 30 days of receiving your claim.

IMPORTANT: If your mover does not receive the claim within 90 days of delivery, your claim can be denied.

Mediation Services Offered by TxDMV

If you have a claim with the mover and are not satisfied with their settlement offer or the mover denies your claim, you can contact TxDMV for mediation. A mediation request must be received at TxDMV within 35 days after the mover has responded to your claim with an unsatisfactory offer or denial, or if you do not receive a response from the mover after 90 days from the original claim.

Mediation is coordinated by TxDMV at no cost to you. The mediation session will be conducted by telephone, by written submissions or in person at TxDMV facilities in Austin, Texas.

You may also pursue your claim further in a court of law at your own expense.

Complaints against a Moving Company

If you feel that your mover is not complying with laws regulating household goods movers, you can file a complaint against the mover with TxDMV in several ways:

- Use “Truck Stop” to file a complaint electronically. Send any supporting documents to truckstop@txdmv.gov and include the complaint ID number;
- Email us at: truckstop@txdmv.gov;
- Call the TxDMV consumer helpline at 1(888) 368-4689. Hours of operation are between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

Interstate Moves

If you're planning to move outside of Texas, you should still do your homework when searching for a legally licensed moving company.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) regulates interstate moving companies and provides helpful information on their website: www.protectyourmove.gov.

This website provides lots of useful information if you're planning to move across state lines. You can also:

- Learn More About Moving Fraud
- Research The Mover You're Interested in Hiring
- File a Complaint on an Interstate Moving Company

Both Federal and State governments, state and local law enforcement agencies, and the legitimate moving industry have all joined forces to combat moving fraud, but you, as the consumer, have the most important role when it comes to moving fraud. **Do not hire an unlicensed moving company and risk losing your items.** If you're planning to move, it's important to do your research and be a "Smart Mover".

Contact Us

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Please see other topics in the "Smart Buyer" series to help you make the best decision possible. The staff that developed "Smart Buyer" series is always interested in new ideas or tips that will make this tool more useful for consumers. If you have a suggestion on how to make this "Smart Buyer" or any of the other "Smart Buyer" topics more helpful for consumers, please send your suggestion to our general mailbox at: enforcement@txdmv.gov.