

Moving in a deregulated world

As the trade association representing the Canadian moving industry, the **Canadian Association of Movers (CAM)** receives requests for referrals to good movers and complaints about bad ones every day.

Often the complaint begins with: "Why aren't there government agencies that protect consumers against bad movers?" or "I sure wish I'd called you before I booked my mover."

Over the last two decades, governments at all levels have tried to reduce the number of regulations controlling various industry sectors. As regulation is reduced, it becomes easier to establish a moving business. Often, this is done by people with little or no moving experience.

So who is out there protecting the consumer?

Government is still there with departments that record and investigate complaints and regulate industry with the tools they have available. In the federal government, the Office of Consumer Affairs within Industry Canada is vitally interested in helping to provide consumer protection through industry participation. They are working with many industry associations to de-

velop programs to identify reputable suppliers to the consumer.

Similarly within all provincial governments, there are agencies that will look into complaints when they see bad business practices occurring. In Ontario, it's the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services that deals with issues of this kind.

Governments are interested in those areas of business that they have the power to control:

- **Fraudulent practices**
- **Misleading advertising**
- **Failure to disclose costs**
- **Unfair business practices**
- **Non-competitive pricing**

Both levels of government can provide consumers with limited information on the performance history of a company. Governments are limited in the information they can provide by the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.

The Better Business Bureau can provide consumers with information on reputable businesses in an area. Its information is available both over the Internet and by phone. They indicate to consumers that a company does or does not have a satisfactory record in its business practices and they record this both for member and non-member companies. This information can be particularly useful in choosing a moving and storage company.

The Better Business Bureau also provides arbitration services when complaints are made against their member companies. The Better Business Bureau can only arbitrate when both parties agree to it.

CAM, the mov-



*John Levi is president of the Canadian Association of Movers. 905-848-6579
Toll free: 1-866-860-0065
admin@mover.net*

ing and storage industry's trade association, has been working with both provincial and federal government agencies, and the Better Business Bureau to provide a referral service for consumers who are looking for a mover and a complaints-handling service for those who have a complaint against a mover.

As an industry association, CAM represents movers across Canada. Its members are committed to providing a high-quality level of service to consumers and to taking responsibility for their actions should there be a complaint.

In order to ensure consumers' risk is minimized when they are moving, CAM ensures that the mover has the necessary qualifications:

- **INCORPORATION** certificate or equivalent to ensure that the company exists and can be found by consumers.
- **WORKERS'** compensation certificate so that consumers are not liable should an injury occur while they are moving.
- **VERIFICATION** of GST reporting.
- **A GOOD** reputation as recognized by its fellow movers.
- **COMMITMENT** to CAM's code of ethics to make movers aware of their responsibility to its consumers.

CAM is able to validate a mover's reputation for most movers in Canada. It will refer consumers to certified movers whenever possible,

other members when it is not, and reputable non-members when members cannot perform the move.

When a complaint occurs against a member, CAM facilitates the resolution of the complaint either through assisting the consumer using the mover's complaint-handling process or referring the matter to the Better Business Bureau for arbitration.

When a complaint is received for a non-member, CAM will offer the consumer some direction as to how to resolve the complaint. It then records the complaint and warns any consumer inquiring about that mover.

Even with all of the above in place, there are still numerous consumer complaints about movers. It remains your responsibility as a consumer to ensure that the mover you hire is reputable and capable of performing your move. It's a lot easier to do a little careful preparation in advance of a move than to chase a mover afterwards with a claim.

The basic rules apply:

- **READ** Industry Canada's Consumer Checklist (available on CAM's website at www.mover.net).
- **FIND** a reputable mover through your provincial government, Better Business Bureau or CAM.
- **GET** three written estimates based on the mover visiting your residence.
- **READ** the terms and conditions of the estimates and your contract.
- **GET** it in writing and keep a copy.
- **VISIT** the mover's premises to ensure they exist.
- **ASK** about the terms of insurance for your goods.

Finding a reputable mover is simple and easy to do. It just requires a few phone calls and website visits.

JUST DO IT!

- John Levi



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