

Avoiding moving pitfalls

Complaints about moving companies rank at the top of the **Better Business Bureau's** listings. As you make plans to move all your worldly goods — your heirlooms, your collections, your furniture — you should be aware of the horrible moving experiences you've seen in the press or on television and heard from friends or family members. And you wonder how to prevent them from happening to you.

There is one basic step that you can take to avoid becoming another victim of an unscrupulous moving company. You must take the step of finding a reputable, professional moving company — one that will treat you fairly and provide you with a safe, reliable moving service. This responsibility is yours. If you do not, your moving experience could prove to be a nightmare, with horrors and heavy costs that could have easily been avoided with a little advance planning. It's simpler to find a reputable mover than you think but you have to look in the right places and ask the right questions.

Telephone directories, the flyer placed under your door, the soliciting phone call or voice mail from an unknown moving company, and the flyer stapled to the local hydro pole can tell you only one thing — the company has a telephone. A telephone number alone will not help you to locate the company if your goods are lost, if the movers don't arrive on

moving day as agreed, or if additional moving charges show up on your credit card statement. It's a lot easier to do a little careful preparation in advance of a move than to chase a mover who's only given you a cell phone number afterwards with a claim.

Your provincial government's office of consumer affairs, the Better Business Bureau and the **Canadian Association of Movers** receive hundreds of calls from consumers each year complaining about bad moves and bad movers, and the related costs they incurred from overcharging, damage to property, late pick up and delivery, and failure of the mover to perform as promised. Each of these agencies can help you find a reputable mover. You will find these agencies in your telephone directory or on our website at www.mover.net.

Disputes over the final cost are the most commonly-heard complaint. Unethical movers may demand cash after promising that a credit card payment is okay, or there may be surprise charges that you've not been told about. Ensure you have a written contract and that it is clear about what services you are to re-

ceive, and how you will have to pay for them. If you add items or change your moving arrangements, you may be obliged to pay more. Talk to your mover — there should be no surprises for either of you on moving day. A reputable mover will disclose information that you need to know before your move.



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Damage to your furniture or home can occur during a move, even with the most careful mover. Goods can disappear. Most damages or losses can generally be avoided by using professional movers who employ trained staff and proper packing and transportation procedures. Be sure your mover explains the care the company will take in packing, transporting and storing your goods. Ask about what happens if damage or loss does occur. How will the mover repair your goods or compensate you for your loss? This compensation can vary depending on the value you declare for your goods on the contract. Don't make assumptions about repairs, replacement or post-move services — ask your mover to explain their liability and claims process.

Transport small valuable items yourself. This includes personal documents, medi-

cines, money, jewellery, coin or stamp collections, computers (or at least your backup disks). Even if there was insurance available for loss of these items, many of them have value that can never be replaced.

Failure to engage a reputable mover can result in a late arrival or no-show on moving day with all of the attendant problems and costs associated with a failed move. Delays caused by traffic or unforeseen circumstances may be unavoidable and may result in legitimate, additional moving charges. But those delays caused by the mover's overbooking or poor scheduling are avoidable. Ensure your pick up and delivery times are shown in writing on your contract. Confirm your moving schedule with your mover the day before your move. Allow for some time delays in your plan.

Keep in mind some simple rules to make your move a good one:

- **DO** your homework in advance.
- **GET** it in writing.
- **PROTECT** your valuables.
- **ENSURE** you have adequate insurance.

But first and foremost, to avoid all of these problems, follow the basic step above. **Find a reputable professional moving company — and both you and your possessions will arrive at your new home in good condition.**

- John Levi

Planning a move?

Contact the **Canadian Association of Movers** first for helpful information.

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