

A CONSUMERS GUIDE TO CHOOSING A MOVER:

Who's protecting your next move?



Consumers call the Canadian Association of Movers (CAM) every day to find good movers and complain about bad ones.

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

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 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 develop 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 some 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.

On July 30 Ontario implemented new regulations under the Consumer Protection Act to protect consumers from questionable business practices. Movers, like other Ontario businesses, are subject to these new regulations.

For example, movers cannot charge their customers more than 10 per cent over the cost they estimated for a move. If the mover charges more than 10 per cent over the estimate, the consumer can hold the mover to the original estimate. Of course, if the consumer asks for additional or different goods or services, the mover can charge extra for those.

The Better Business Bureau (BBB) is another body that can provide consumers with valuable information on reputable businesses in an area. They advise consumers whether 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 BBB also provides arbitration services when com-

plaints are made against their member companies, although it can only arbitrate when both parties agree to it.

CAM, as the moving and storage industry's trade association, has been working with both provincial and federal government agencies and the BBB 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.

CAM is able to validate a mover's reputation for most movers in Canada. It will refer consumers to reputable, professional moving and storage companies. Movers that are members of CAM 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:

- Business registration 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.

When a complaint occurs against a member, CAM facilitates the resolution of the complaint either through

assisting the consumer using the mover's complaint process or referring the matter to the BBB 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 for having a successful move apply:

1. Find a reputable mover through the following agencies:
 - the BBB at 1-800-459-8875 (toll free),
 - Ontario's consumer protection agency, the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services, at 416-326-8800, and/or
 - CAM at 905-848-6579 or 1-866-860-0065 (toll free), or visit www.mover.net.
 2. Ask at least three different movers for written estimates.
 3. Make sure you have adequate insurance protection for your goods.
 4. Get the terms and conditions of your move in writing and keep a copy.
- Finding a reputable mover is simple and easy to do. It just requires a few phone calls and website visits.