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Experts Promote Consumer Awareness of Online Moving Scams

SMA and TxDMV Work to Educate Texans During National Moving Month

AUSTIN – Southwest Movers Association (SMA) and the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) have teamed up to help consumers avoid the traps of online moving scams during National Moving Month. May marks the beginning of the busiest moving season for Texans, which is also when unscrupulous operators are most likely to take advantage of consumers.

In fiscal year 2010, the TxDMV investigated 272 complaints against unlicensed movers. It is estimated that 80 percent of these complaints were the result of consumers using rogue operators they found online. As a first line of defense to protect Texans, TxDMV and SMA are diligently educating consumers on how they can avoid falling victim to online deals that are too good to be true.

“We are seeing a steady rise in online moving scams that ultimately put Texans and their possessions in precarious situations,” said Bill Harbeson, the TxDMV’s Enforcement Division director. “These rogue operators prey on Texans who are unaware of their rights as consumers.”

Before hiring a mover, consumers need to check that the moving company is properly licensed (registered) with the TxDMV. State law requires that anyone offering or performing a moving service must be credentialed by the TxDMV.

To verify whether a mover is properly licensed, you can go to the TxDMV website, www.TxDMV.gov and click on “Moving Companies” or call (888) 368-4689 and press option 3.

Obtaining a written estimate is another important component to the moving process. Prior to loading, a mover is required to provide a written proposal. The proposal must provide the maximum amount required to be paid at delivery. The proposal must be one of two types:

- Binding. A binding proposal states the exact price of the move.
- Not-To-Exceed. A not-to-exceed proposal states the maximum price of the move, but allows the mover to charge less than the maximum.

Consumers also need to be aware that they should insure their valuables. A mover’s standard liability of \$.60 per pound per article will not replace any item that is damaged. Consumers should ask if a higher level of liability is available or if transit insurance is available for purchase and know how much a mover’s insurance will cover for broken or misplaced items.

Clarity on pickup and delivery dates, especially if there are firm vacate deadlines, is also important. To make sure there is no confusion, consumers should note any deadlines on the written proposal or moving services contract.

“Unfortunately, an unprepared Texan is an easy target for rogue operators looking to cut corners and defraud consumers,” said SMA Executive Director John D. Esparza. “Our goal is to be pro-active and educate consumers of their rights, preparing families for all facets of the moving process.

Texas is home to more than 700 registered movers and knowing how to select a mover can be difficult. To help empower Texans, these valuable links contain useful information:

www.mytexasmover.com

www.TxDMV.gov

www.moving.org

www.fmcsa.dot.gov/about/outreach/moving/moving.htm

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Southwest Movers Association, a non-profit trade association founded in 1917, represents a membership of professional moving companies throughout the state of Texas. The association is dedicated to promoting a safe and reliable moving industry that includes adherence to state laws and ethical standards. To learn more, visit: www.mytexasmover.com.

The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, which regulates the moving industry in Texas, does not endorse any particular licensed moving company. The TxDMV is a great resource for consumers, and investigates complaints arising out of household goods moves. You can find out more at: www.TxDMV.gov.