



10 Ways to Avoid Moving Scams

Moving is bad enough. Getting scammed by your mover is worse.

It happens to hundreds of unsuspecting Oregonians every year. Routine problems include damaged goods, bait-and-switch cost estimates, delayed deliveries and belongings held for ransom. Recently, there has been an increase in household goods shipments being hijacked by rogue movers. A shipment is hijacked when the rogue movers steal all the high value items and discard the rest of the shipment. The victims never see their property again.



Attorney General Ellen
Rosenblum

Here are ten ways to protect yourself and minimize headaches on moving day:

1. Shop around. "When shopping for movers, it is a good idea to get at least three estimates," says Attorney General Ellen

Rosenblum. "If you have one estimate that's really, really low compared to the other two, you should be suspicious," she says.

2. Get reliable estimates in your home. Avoid any company that won't send a representative to your apartment or house. Legitimate movers will spend 20 minutes or more looking at your belongings, answering your questions and crafting a detailed estimate in writing. Prices will be based on weight, which can be verified by weighing the truck before and after it is loaded, not cubic feet.

Many illegal moving companies will attempt to pressure consumers into charges based upon cubic feet of the shipment because that information can be easily manipulated and difficult to verify by the consumer. A common scam used by illegal movers involves misquoting the cubic foot capacity of the truck and/or exaggerating the total cubic feet of the consumer's belongings.

3. Make sure the company exists. Ask to see their moving trucks and their temporary storage space. Look for clean, well-kept spaces that indicate legitimacy and care.

4. Do your research. Check the Oregon Department of Justice's BelnFORmed database online at www.oregonconsumer.gov to see if any complaints against the company have been filed. You also can dig deeper using resources like www.MovingScam.com and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's website, www.ProtectYourMove.gov. When the origin and destination of a move are within Oregon, moving company rates and services are regulated by the Oregon Department of Transportation. A list of these authorized movers can be found online at www.oregon.gov/ODOT/mct/Pages/movers.aspx.

5. Check references. Ask companies for local references. Spend a few minutes on the phone with a previous client to obtain information that either sets off alarm bells or puts your mind at ease. Online testimonials can be helpful, but there is no replacement for a conversation with a real person who has utilized

the company's services. Any company that can't - or won't - provide references isn't a good candidate.

6. Put everything in your agreement. It should include the moving and delivery dates, all costs and fees associated with the move, as well as a list of your belongings. In addition, ensure there are no last-minute charges for gas, moving pads, stairs, distance between the truck and residence or anything else, such as a "driver's fee."

Don't sign anything that looks or feels suspicious. No spaces on the contract should be left blank so they can be filled in later. Movers can't legally charge more than 110 percent of their price estimate. Some movers demand a 20 percent gratuity on top of the bill - even before they unload the truck - with no mention of it in the contract.

7. Know what they'll do if something goes wrong. Even reputable movers occasionally drop vases and scratch valuables. The difference between a good mover and a bad mover when this happens is that a good mover has a solid claims process to make sure you recoup any damages.

You should learn about the claims process before signing the contract. Does the company have its own claims agent? Does it outsource claims to a third party? Do you have to go directly to the insurance company that you're buying your valuation through?

Reputable companies have an internal quality-control department and a contact to help you with your claim.

8. Are the employees reputable? You are allowing these people into your home and they will be responsible for the safety of your possessions. Not to mention, they will have access to your loved ones. Request verification that the moving company has conducted background checks and tested for drugs.

9. Do the company's name and numbers match? Make sure the U.S. Department of Transportation name and number on your paperwork matches the number on the truck parked outside your home. These should be identical.

When it's moving time and your hired mover shows up with a rental truck, it behooves you to cancel the agreement right there and demand your deposit back.

10. Don't pay a large deposit. Some companies require a down payment or deposit as high as 25% of the total move. Reputable companies do not require you to pay everything upfront. Nevertheless, with any deposit, consumers should make sure it is refundable, because the closing could always fall through.

"I'd be very suspicious of a moving company that expects a substantial payment upfront, especially if you're just moving across town," Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum says.

If you think you have fallen victim to a moving scam, contact the Oregon Department of Justice online at www.oregonconsumer.gov or call 1-877-877-9392.



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