

All the Right Moves

BY FRANCES A. KENNELEY

Are you one of the 43-million Americans planning to relocate this year? If so, chances are you're already worrying about how you'll manage. Moving is incredibly stressful. I know—I've done it 14 times in 17 years.

Trust me: It pays to hire the pros. On average, hiring a mover costs 11 to 20 percent more than moving on your own, but it's a small sum to pay to help ensure that your things arrive intact.

To get the best price, figure out how much you'll be moving, then get several estimates (binding estimates are preferable). But before you pick a company, investigate its reputation. Ask for references from friends and neighbors, and call the Better Business Bureau to find out if any complaints have been lodged against the company.

Also make sure to ask the following questions before signing any contract:

■ Is there a discount available for moving off-season?

■ Are pickup and delivery dates guaranteed? Most movers give a two- to three-day range for loading and unloading.

■ What extra charges might you incur? If the estimate isn't binding, you may be assessed fees if, for instance, the distance from the truck to your door is excessive, or if loading and unloading the van involves stairs.

■ How much will you be reimbursed for lost or damaged items? By law, movers are obliged to reimburse you sixty cents per pound for damages. Many movers offer additional insurance, but before you buy it, check your homeowner's policy—you may already be covered.

■ Are owner-packed cartons insured? Many movers won't cover damage to boxes that you pack.

■ What is the procedure for filing a claim? The company's customer-service department should be able to handle any claims. Ask if your mover subscribes to the AMC's dispute resolution program.

■ What forms of payment are accepted? You'll probably need to present a cashier's check or a previously authorized charge to a credit card.

For a free booklet from The American Movers Conference, "Guide to a Satisfying Move," send an SASE with a thirty-two cent stamp to: American Movers Conference, 1611 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3482.

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