

If you're preparing to move to another state, you have your work cut out for you.

The challenges of an interstate move are inherently different and you should do your best to prepare for the tasks ahead. Before you pack your entire life into a cardboard box, you will need to find a moving company you can entrust with your belongings.

Federal and state regulations hold interstate moving companies to a different standard than local movers and it's important that you do too.

Rights and Responsibilities of Interstate Movers

It shouldn't come as a complete surprise that interstate moving companies are regulated differently than local movers considering the extra distance and risk covered by an out-of-state move.

To ensure you are aware of our rights, interstate moving companies are mandated to provide you with a booklet published by the United States Department of Transportation's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, entitled *Your Rights and Responsibilities When You Move*.

Key Federal Requirements for Interstate Movers

Regulators impose a number of special standards upon interstate moving companies to keep them compliant with federal and state laws. These laws are written to ensure the safe, legal transit of your belongings.

At the very least, you should ensure that a mover holds interstate operating authority before letting them take possession of your property. Here's how to tell whether your movers are qualified:

- ***Acceptable Insurance Levels.*** All interstate movers are required to carry a minimum level of motor vehicle insurance and liability insurance, as well as workers' compensation insurance to protect employees (and customers) in the event that a worker is injured while transporting your goods.

- **FMCSA Registration.** Make sure your interstate moving company is registered with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to transport household goods across state lines, and that their registration is up-to-date. Interstate movers are required to update their registration every two years.
- **U.S. DOT. Number.** In addition to FMCSA registration, interstate moving companies should also have a unique identifier issued by the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT). This number is used to keep track of things like audits, compliance reviews, crash investigations, inspections, and other safety information.

What to Look for in an Interstate Moving Company

Before hiring a moving company for your interstate move, you'll want to make sure you are dealing with a reputable, licensed provider with interstate operating authority. Even though most moving companies follow the letter of the law, fraudulent companies work hard to find their way into unsuspecting mover's homes every day.

Start your search by qualifying a number of moving companies. Take time to examine reputations, business practices and compliance with the law. Read reviews and check with the Better Business Bureau before contracting with a provider. Resources like Google and Yelp can also reveal a wealth of information about dishonest movers.

Take special note if you find that a moving company isn't registered with the United States Department of Transportation or refuses to provide vital information about claim forms and disputes.

Ask for a Binding Estimate

Before contracting with a moving company, make sure to get a binding estimate in writing. This is different than a price quote, because a binding estimate cannot be adjusted after the move is over, regardless of circumstantial changes along the way.

Without a legally binding estimate, a dishonest moving company might change the final charges for a variety of reasons. They may claim improper

calculations, incomplete inventories or even worse, may provide absolutely no explanation at all.

Get Extra Insurance If You Need It

You may also want to invest in additional property coverage before moving day. Interstate moving companies offer mandated minimum liability coverage, which may not fully cover many of your high-value antiques and art. Your moving company should be able to explain the full-value, lump sum, declared value, and basic carrier liability options to you.

Approve All the Final Details

You and your moving company should be on the same page regarding details such as when they will arrive at your current residence as well as a window when they will deliver your items to your new residence. They should also inform you of exactly what you can expect on both days.

Inventory Your Household Items

Before packing everything into boxes, create an inventory of all your household items with descriptions of their condition. Your movers should agree to this inventory prior to moving day.

Go Over Documents with a Fine-Tooth Comb

It's important to read everything - including the bill of lading, estimate, inventory and service order - before signing it. Also hang on to your copies until the move is over and you've paid for their services in-full.

Confirm the Contact Info (Yours and Theirs)

You will also want to make sure you have contact information for the moving company written down and stored in a safe place before, during and after the move. Also confirm that they have all of your relevant contact information including the address of your current residence, address of your new residence and your cell phone number.

Be Present on the Big Day

Make sure you have a check ready before movers arrive on move-in day. Your moving contract will likely require a payment before unloading. Once the payment has been processed, you'll want to find a convenient spot near the moving truck to inspect items for damage as they are being unloaded. Confirm that everything from your inventory list is delivered before your drivers take off.

It may seem like an awful lot of work to be this prepared, but it's nothing compared to the headaches of being ripped off by disreputable movers.