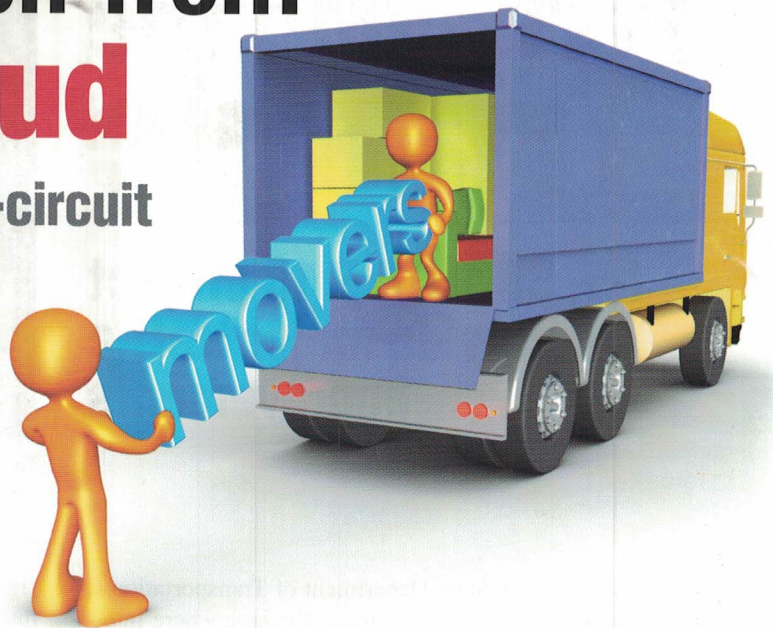


Protect Yourself from Moving Fraud

Proper research can short-circuit “rogue movers” before trouble starts



By Jim Tutton

Thousands of Washington residents relocate each year for personal reasons and career opportunities. It's a significant event in anyone's life. Your money, your memories are at stake. It can be a trying time even under the best of circumstances. So know how to avoid one of the worst stressful situations that can arise, protecting against dishonest movers.

Most moving companies in Washington are legitimate businesses that do quality work. But in recent years, a growing number of complaints have been filed against intrastate movers – movers that perform household goods moves between points in Washington – and many of those complaints spring from the fraudulent practices of a small percentage of “rogue movers.”

Rogue movers typically work like this: Without ever visiting your home or seeing the goods you want moved, they provide you with a low-ball estimate over the telephone or by use of the Internet. Once your goods are on their truck, they demand more money before they'll deliver or unload them. They hold your goods hostage and force you to pay more – sometimes much more than you thought you had agreed to – if you want your valued possessions back.

Fortunately, there are several logical, easy steps you can take to ensure you choose a reputable moving company:

1. Getting a written cost estimate of your move from several moving companies. The estimate should be based on an actual inspection of your household goods.

- 2. Making sure the mover has insurance and the proper operating authority** issued by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission. Double-check a mover's authority by logging on to www.wutc.wa.gov.
- 3. Remembering priorities when choosing a mover.** If you hire based solely on the cheapest price, you may sacrifice other more important things, such as getting your possessions moved and delivered safely on time. Remember, movers in Washington are legally required to deliver your goods for no more than 10 percent above the price of a non-binding estimate.
- 4. Beware of Internet-Based Move Brokers.** Most brokers end up handing your move over to a different moving company – one you have not researched. And never do business with a company that lists only a telephone number in its advertisement or website – a definite red flag for trouble.
- 5. Do your homework.** Read “Your Guide to Moving in Washington State,” a booklet from the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission that your mover is required to give if you are moving within Washington. This booklet also has information you'll need if your goods are lost or damaged. Finally, check the mover's complaint history with local consumer advocacy organizations, such as the Better Business Bureau.

By following these simple steps, choosing a reputable moving company will result in a highly successful and quality experience. For additional information on finding the right moving company, check out www.wmcmovers.com. ■

Note: Jim Tutton is executive director of the Washington Movers Conference – Washington's trade association for the professional moving industry. Reach him at 800-732-9019 or jim@wtassns.com.