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Moving Month Event Highlights Consumer Protection

Consumer Advocates, Industry Experts and State Regulators Join Forces to Educate Texans on Consumer Rights

#MoveSafeTX

AUSTIN, Texas—Illegal moving companies are operating statewide, taking a financial and emotional toll on Texans who find themselves faced with losing everything they own or paying a ransom to release their belongings. Texas consumer advocates are fighting back by educating Texans on the current laws and regulations.

At a press conference Tuesday afternoon on the steps of the Texas State Capitol, government agencies, moving industry experts, and consumer advocates cautioned Texans to do their homework before hiring a moving company. Leaders with the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV), Southwest Movers Association (SMA), American Moving & Storage Association (AMSA) and Better Business Bureau (BBB) encouraged consumers to take note of their rights and responsibilities.

“May marks the beginning of the busiest moving season of the year; a time that can be riddled with illegal and unethical operators preying on unsuspecting Texans,” said Southwest Movers Association Executive Director John D. Esparza, the state association representing licensed movers. “As one of the largest and fastest-growing states in the U.S., it is important to educate our citizens on the moving standards they should expect.”

Texas legislators have stiffened fines and penalties for illegal operators; that includes jail time for repeat offenses. TxDMV’s enforcement investigators also assist the federal government with interstate complaints, and putting unlicensed movers on notice that any attempts to operate in Texas will not be tolerated by the state.

“TxDMV is determined to make Texas one of safest states in which consumers hire a moving company,” said Whitney Brewster, the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles’ Executive Director. “Unlicensed movers are not legitimate moving companies. Visit Truck Stop on www.TxDMV.gov to verify if a mover is licensed in Texas.”

In an effort to further educate consumers, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has created a Household Goods Consumer Protection Working Group. The 14-person panel includes representatives from AMSA, SMA and BBB. The national group is tasked with developing the most effective ways to convey rights and legal information to consumers regarding the transportation of household goods.

“While there are many moving companies that are trustworthy, it only takes picking the wrong one to put you in a bad situation,” said Carrie A. Hurt, president and CEO for BBB serving the Heart of Texas. “That’s why it is so important to do your research before hiring any business to move your belongings.”

With so many things on the move “to-do list,” people often don’t spend the time investigating who they are about to hire. Equipping Texans with accessible tools and educating them on their rights, *Don’t Make a Move Without Us*, a campaign launched by TxDMV, is part of that toolbox as is FMCSA’s *Protect Your Move* campaign, a partnership between federal, state and local officials, and the moving industry.

American Moving & Storage Association and Southwest Movers Association have also created certification programs to help fight back against moving company imposters, certifying elite moving companies committed to honest and ethical business practices, and designating them as either Pinnacle Movers or ProMovers.

“It’s important to trust your prized belongings with a professional. All of these ProMovers are fully licensed and insured, and they meet high standards for safety and professionalism,” said Michael Keaton, Senior Director of Communications at the American Moving & Storage Association, the industry’s national trade group.

Moving fraud is preventable and the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV), Southwest Movers Association (SMA) and Better Business Bureau (BBB) serving the Heart of Texas offered all consumers important steps to take before moving as well as helpful tools to use during and after a move.

Consumer Awareness Tips

Texas law requires:

- A mover to be actively licensed with TxDMV and USDOT.
- A valid TxDMV or USDOT number must be displayed on the moving truck.

A mover must give consumers:

- A written proposal or estimate that shows either a guaranteed flat price (binding amount) or a “not to exceed” maximum amount for the move.
- A written and signed contract before the move begins.
- Standard liability of 60 cents per pound per item. (Note: It is unlikely standard liability will cover the cost of your item. Some movers offer the option to purchase an increased liability amount for goods or you can purchase insurance that will cover the cost of your possessions.)
- A brochure that outlines your Rights & Responsibilities under Texas law.
- Another copy of the contract upon completion of the move. This contract should include the total charge for the move; an itemized list of what the charges are for; and the method used to calculate the charges. If you decide to alter the original contract, the moving company must write an amendment that outlines any additional charges and services. You and the moving company representative must sign and date the amended contract.

Always remember:

- Hire a licensed mover with a valid TxDMV and USDOT number.
- Check the company’s license status at TxDMV’s Truck Stop at www.TxDMV.gov. For out of state moves, visit FMCSA’s www.ProtectYourMove.gov.
- Never accept a verbal quote or agreement. Get everything in writing, signed and dated.
- Use reputable, online sources when looking for a mover: www.MyTexasMover.com, www.BBB.org and www.Movers.org, when looking for a professional moving company. Your Texas Realtor can also provide recommendations for reputable moving companies in the area.
- ProMovers (AMSA certification) and Pinnacle Movers (SMA Certification) are elite groups of movers held to high standards of service, conduct and ethics within the industry. Visit www.Moving.org or www.MyTexasMover.com.
- BBB Accredited Businesses abide by BBB’s eight Standards for Trust, which includes advertising honestly, honoring promises, safeguarding privacy and telling the truth. For a list of BBB accredited movers in your area, visit CheckBBB.org.

If you have a problem:

- Call your local police if a mover attempts to hold your items hostage for additional payment not in your contract or threatens to drive off with your belongings.
- Always file a complaint with both the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles and Better Business Bureau.

For additional tips and information, visit:

- Better Business Bureau www.BBB.org/central-texas
- Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, www.TxDMV.gov
- Southwest Movers Association, www.MyTexasMover.com
- American Moving & Storage Association, www.Moving.org