

BAY AREA CONSUMERS'
CHECKBOOK
Highlights: Housecleaners

Some people derive deep satisfaction from cleaning their homes. Then there's the other 99 percent of humanity who'd rather spend their free time doing just about anything else. If you're hunting for a housecleaner, **Bay Area Consumers' Checkbook**, available at www.checkbook.org, offers ratings of local companies and gives tips for getting great service from either a company or an individual. Some highlights from Checkbook's report:

Company vs. individual

One advantage of using a housecleaning company is that you don't have the legal responsibilities, such as paying taxes, associated with hiring an individual. But with a company, it may be difficult to build a relationship as you might with an individual, for what is inherently a very personal job.

In its evaluation of local housecleaning services, Checkbook found:

- Surveyed customers who use housecleaning companies were less satisfied than those who employ individuals—with 60 percent rating housecleaning companies “superior” for “overall quality” compared to 71 percent for individuals.
- For doing the same work in the same home, companies' prices varied significantly.
 - For once-per-week cleaning of a two-story house with three bedrooms and two bathrooms, Checkbook found prices ranging from \$88 to \$244.
 - For semi-weekly cleaning of a condo with two bedrooms and two bathrooms, Checkbook found prices ranging from \$95 to \$203.
 - For a one-time pre-move-in cleaning of an empty two-story house with four bedrooms and 3.5 bathrooms, Checkbook found prices ranging from \$175 to \$685.

Using a housecleaning company

- Checkbook receives lots of negative feedback on housecleaning companies, so be cautious when choosing one. Most complaints relate to sloppy work, and others cite quality of work deteriorating over time.
- Before hiring a company, get price estimates from several companies. Most companies will give quotes by phone.
- To avoid disputes over what work is to be done and how much it costs, ask companies to inspect your home and provide written price quotes.
- Tell the company's estimator everything you expect to be done. Some tasks may seem obvious, but better to err on the side of too much detail.
- Get certificates of insurance—liability and workers' compensation—from any company you hire.
- The first few times a crew comes, plan to be home to oversee the work.
- Before a company comes to clean, store cell phones, jewelry, and other valuables in a safe place, and secure out of harm's way any heirlooms, china, or other fragile articles apt to be knocked over, spilled on, or otherwise damaged.

Using an individual housecleaner

- Check references by describing your job expectations and asking if they encountered any problems.
- Make a list of tasks and how often you want them done. Make sure you describe jobs you are picky about or that could be out of the ordinary.
- Review the terms of employment—duties to perform, pay, schedule, and benefits—and put them in writing.
- Find out your legal requirements for paying taxes and discuss these in advance with any employee.

Checkbook's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.