



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—or nothing at all. If you're hunting for a housecleaner, *Chicago Consumers' CHECKBOOK* magazine, also available at www.checkbook.org, offers ratings of local companies and gives advice on getting the service you expect from either a housecleaning company or an individual.

Using a Housecleaning Company

The advantages of using a housecleaning company are that companies are easy to find and that you don't have the responsibilities, such as paying taxes, associated with hiring an individual. But with a company, it is difficult to build a consistent, personal relationship as you might with an individual, for what is inherently a very personal job.

In its evaluation of local housecleaning services, CHECKBOOK found—

- People who use housecleaning companies were less satisfied than those who employ individuals—with 52 percent rating housecleaning companies “superior” for “overall performance” compared to 83 percent for individuals.
- There are substantial differences among housecleaning companies in how they are rated by their customers for quality. Some of the 21 companies CHECKBOOK evaluated were rated “superior” for “overall performance” by at least 65 percent of their surveyed customers, but others got such favorable ratings from fewer than 40 percent of their surveyed customers.
- For doing the same work in the same home, companies' prices varied dramatically.
 - For an every-other-week cleaning of a two-story house with three bedrooms and two baths, CHECKBOOK found prices ranging from \$75 to \$155.
 - For a once-per-week cleaning of a condo with two bedrooms and two bathrooms, CHECKBOOK found prices ranging from \$50 to \$106.

CHECKBOOK gives advice on dealing with housecleaning companies, including:

- Before hiring a company, get price estimates from several companies.
- While shopping by phone can give you a good idea of which firms will be reasonably priced, have a service come to your home to give you a firm estimate before hiring it.
- When getting phone estimates, give a careful description of your home—number of floors, bedrooms, bathrooms, and other rooms to be cleaned, with what types of floors, how large,

etc.—and mention how often you want the cleaners to come. Some companies charge more per visit if they will be coming less often.

- With an in-home estimate, be sure the company gives you a written description of exactly what work is to be done—so there are no surprises about extra charges or work not done.
- Get certificates of insurance—liability and workers' compensation—from any company you are considering.
- Try to arrange to have the same crew come for each cleaning, and to have the company tell you in advance if different workers will be coming.
- The first time a crew comes, plan to be home to explain to the workers what you want done. Be sure to mention matters you might be picky about.

Using an Individual House Cleaner

CHECKBOOK also advises on how to build a good relationship and get good service from an individual house cleaner. A few points—

- Try to find your employee through friends who are satisfied. That is how most individual house cleaners are found.
- Check references by describing the work you need done and your own tastes and pet peeves, and asking for an honest assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the person you are considering.
- Go through your home with the person you might hire, explaining your expectations, and inviting questions and comments. Make a list of tasks and a job description.
- Put the terms of employment—pay, schedule, and benefits—in writing.
- Find out your legal requirements for paying taxes and discuss these in advance with any employee.

The media may cite selected examples of top-rated housecleaning companies, as shown in Chicago Consumers' CHECKBOOK, and CHECKBOOK's editors are available for interviews. Please call Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 to schedule.

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