



Highlights: Moving Companies

Relocating is never easy, but working with a quality moving company can eliminate much of the stress. With ratings of local moving companies, price information, and expert advice, **Washington Consumers' Checkbook** (Checkbook.org) will help make your move a smooth one. Highlights from Checkbook's report:

Tips for a smooth move

- Beware of online brokers. These companies simply collect a deposit and arrange for a company to handle the move. The problem is you have no control over which company is hired. And there are reports that some brokers work mainly with unlicensed or otherwise disreputable companies.
- To ensure you aren't dealing with a broker, if a moving company can't be reached via phone, or won't come to your home to provide an on-site written estimate, don't hire it.
- Shop around. To get a good price (there are big differences—see comparisons below), have several reputable companies give you written estimates, showing the rates that are used to calculate the estimate—either per hour or rates based on weight and mileage.
- If the price is based on hours needed for the job, Checkbook recommends an estimate with a cap to prevent the movers from working more slowly, causing the cost to rise.
- Maryland law stipulates that movers must provide written estimates and must indicate whether estimates are binding or not. For nonbinding estimates, movers cannot charge consumers more than 25 percent above the total estimated cost. So if you're moving to or from a Maryland address, any written, nonbinding estimate in effect includes a not-to-exceed price.
- If you are moving over 30 road miles within Virginia, movers' estimates are based on tariffs they must file with the Department of Motor Vehicles. A mover cannot charge more than its maximum tariff, which is based on weight and distance, but a mover may discount its tariff.
- In D.C., movers are required to provide a written contract unless the total cost will be less than \$50.
- Think about what services you'll want. You can save a lot of money by doing work yourself, particularly by doing your own packing.
- Be sure estimates detail the services to be performed and include an item inventory.
- Be present and attentive when belongings are loaded and unloaded.
- Carefully read the bill of lading (the contract between you and the mover) before you sign it, and keep it until your shipment is delivered, all charges are paid, and all claims, if any, are settled.
- As your goods are unloaded, check your inventory to be sure each item has arrived in good condition. Don't sign anything without first writing in notes of any damage.
- No matter who does the packing work, move fragile or valuable belongings on your own.

Price and quality of local companies

- Checkbook found substantial company-to-company price differences for the same moving jobs. For example:
 - Prices to move a four-bedroom house from Fairfax to Chantilly ranged from less than \$1,800 to more than \$3,800.
 - Prices to move a townhouse from Silver Spring to Hyattsville ranged from less than \$850 to more than \$1,700.
- Among the companies Checkbook evaluated, some were rated "superior" for "overall quality" by 90 percent or more of their surveyed customers. On the other hand, others received such favorable ratings from 60 percent or fewer of their surveyed customers.

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