

Long Distance Interstate

Moving on a Budget

Avoid unexpected hidden charges from a long distance interstate moving company by understanding the secrets of how movers calculate their prices.

Long distance interstate moving is stressful and unpleasant even under the best of circumstances. Moving is an expensive undertaking and generally you will receive the level of service you pay for. If you hire a nationally known company you will pay top dollar but will typically receive top of the line service. On the other hand if you have friends who are willing to work for free, are capable and not afraid of exhausting work, then you could rent a truck, pack your own property, have help with the loading and driving, and potentially save thousands of dollars.

For people who do not want to spend top dollar on a nationally known moving company and can't or don't want to do a self-move there are good alternatives. To save money and avoid the hard work consumers can hire a smaller independent moving company, use a broker service, or hire a "you load – they drive" container service. These options are alternatives to expensive top of the line movers or complete do it yourself move. However, consumers using these cost saving services need to have realistic expectations of what is and is not included in the price.

Between the stress of packing, planning, and dealing with the challenges of being uprooted, the last thing consumers need are unexpected hidden charges increasing the cost of the move. To help avoid unexpected charges, a consumer should first understand the types of moving company options available and the cost associated for each.

Generally, there are four categories of long distance moving options. Each category has pros and cons, includes different services, and ranges widely in costs. To help manage the final cost of the move a consumer must understand what is included in the service they are purchasing and how charges are calculated.

Long distance moving service options:

Option 1: Full service all inclusive moving from a nationally known major van line.

The top of the line service in the moving industry is a full service all inclusive move performed by a nationally known major van line. Generally, the major van lines perform quality services with the highest degree of professionalism and will charge a premium for their services. They will send a representative to your home to provide an estimate, send a team of movers in matching uniforms to do all the packing in your home, transport your goods in shiny new trucks, provide full insurance coverage for any loss or damages, and deliver quickly on a guaranteed date. The nationally known major van line is a good choice for consumers who don't want to lift a finger during their move, receive white glove services, and don't mind paying a premium price.

Option 2: Regional independent moving company and/or moving broker offering *à la carte* services at discounted pricing.

An alternative to hiring a nationally known major van line is to use the services of a moving broker working with a network of smaller independent regional moving companies. Many of the regional independent moving companies in the broker's network offer *à la carte* moving services. Typically moving brokers provide written estimates based upon a specific list of *à la carte* moving services and items to be moved. Consumers can choose to save money by selecting the service options they want. For example a consumer may wish to choose to perform their own packing, or select the longer ground delivery window instead of an expedited or guaranteed delivery service option. Services are generally offered at a lower cost since the consumer may choose to do some of the work themselves, the broker searches its network for a moving company who has availability on that date, and the property would be consolidated with other shipments on the same truck for transport.

Using the services of a regional independent moving company from a moving broker's network can result in cost savings. However, consumers need to be aware that prices are quoted based upon a specific list of services. Any deviation or additions to the services ordered can result in price increases – sometimes dramatic price increases. For example, a price quote could be issued based upon moving 150 specified items with no packing services included. If however, on the day the mover arrives for the pick-up the customer adds 30 additional boxes to be moved and also needs the movers to finish some of the packing – the price will increase. Consumers hiring a regional independent moving company from a broker's network can save a great deal of money, but should have a very clear understanding of what services are and are not included in the price. Any extra service or additional items to be moved that were not included on the moving quote will increase the final price.

Option 3: Self pack and load - they drive container service.

Consumers wishing to do all the packing and loading themselves can hire a "container" service company. Generally, companies offering "container" services will drop off a large container at your home. It is up to you to perform all the packing and loading of the container yourself. Once you have completed the packing and loading the company will pick up the container and deliver it to your new home where you will unload and unpack.

Container services are good alternatives for people who do not need any assistance with packing or loading of their property. Container service companies charge based upon the size of the container rented, the distance the container is transported, and the days you keep the container in your possession. Consumers need to be aware that container services may not offer insurance coverage for any damage or breakage of the property moved since it is self-packed. Additionally, container moving services for long distance moves are not regulated by the government and therefore a consumer is not protected by the moving industry consumer protection laws – such

as requirements for licensing, cargo insurance coverage, and price increase limits.

Option 4: Complete do it yourself rent-a-truck moving.

The least expensive option in moving is a do it yourself move. Consumers choosing this option will rent a truck from a rental company and do all the packing, loading, and driving themselves. Keeping in mind that moving is excruciatingly hard work, this is a good option if you have friends and family who can help and you don't mind taking on all the responsibility and stress for completing the move.

Costs associated with a self-service rent a truck move includes the costs of the rental truck, per mile charge, fuel charge, packing supplies, your time in driving, and in some cases pizza and beer for your "volunteers."

How charges for professional moving services are calculated:

Of the four options listed above the two with the biggest variations in pricing are the full service moves through a major van lines and the *à la carte* moving services offered from regional independent movers in a broker's network.

Generally, interstate moves performed by the nationally known major van lines or the regional independent moving companies are charged based on the weight of the property being transported or the amount of space (cubic feet) the property occupies on the truck, the distance traveled, time of year the move takes place, and the service options ordered.

If the charges are based upon weight make certain that you are provided with official certified scale certificates verifying the accuracy of the weight. After the goods have been packed and loaded the truck will be weighed to determine the "line-haul" charges. Only after the truck and property has been weighed and services performed can the actual final charges be determined.

Since the estimates are not typically guaranteed and the final price cannot be determined until services have been performed, the final actual charges could be higher or lower than the estimate. Generally, you are only required to pay up to the amount of the last estimate issued to receive your property. Any charges above the last estimate issued are due thirty days after delivery. Also, it is standard practice for a moving company to offer extra services at an additional charge. An example of extra services not included in the weight or "line-haul" charges are for the use of expedited guaranteed delivery service, stairs, shuttle, long carry, elevator, packing and labor, storage, appliance services, etc. You must have a clear understanding of what services are included in your estimate and what services will be charged at an additional rate.

Common reasons the final price increases above the original estimate:

Perhaps the biggest complaint consumers have about moving companies is that the final price of the move exceeded the original estimate. As explained above charges for moving services are based on many factors which could be unknown before the services have been completed. In some cases it can be difficult to estimate the exact weight of all the property in a house, or if there will be special services required at the delivery destination.

A professional moving company should be able to give a reasonably accurate estimate. However, all estimates are based upon the information provided by the consumer. In some cases a consumer may not know if the extra services, such as stairs or long carry, will be required to complete delivery at the destination. There are many legitimate reasons the final changes for a move could end up higher than the original estimate given. Consumers need to be made aware in advance of the prices for extra services and be prepared to pay more money than originally anticipated if those services are required. Consider the

following list of common reasons the final cost of a move would increase above the estimate.

Common reasons the final price increases above the original estimate:

- *After originally anticipating doing their own packing, the consumer runs out of time before the pick-up date and needs the mover to perform last minute packing services.*
- *The estimator miscalculates the weight of certain items of furniture and ends up issuing an inaccurate estimate.*
- *A well intentioned conscientious consumer may request a moving estimate a month or two before their actual move date. Since the estimate was requested well in advance, the consumer did not have all their boxes packed when the estimator inquires "how many boxes will you be shipping?" It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of boxes which will be used to pack clothes, dishes, books, pantry items, garage items, and an entire household of miscellaneous items – when nothing has been packed.*
- *In the process of downsizing a customer may request an estimate based upon a specific list of items to be moved with the anticipation that they will sell, donate, or discard some of their current property. If the customer fails to sell, donate, or discard the property the size and cost of the move is increased.*
- *Under the stress of planning a cross country move the consumer may simply forget to inform the estimator of seldom used items located in an attic, storage shed, or basement.*
- *In some cases a consumer may fail to inform the estimator of certain items to be moved in hope that they can lock in a lower price – not realizing that the final price would be based upon the weight of all the items moved (disclosed in advance or not) and services performed.*

Common reasons the final price increases above the original estimate:

The customer may not be familiar with the specific characteristics of the destination home resulting in extra unanticipated charges. Unanticipated extra service charges could include:

Shuttle charge: The use of a smaller truck to provide service to homes not accessible to the mover's normal 18 wheeler because of limited space or roadway restrictions. For example, delivery into downtown San Francisco.

Long Carry charge: A charge for carrying articles excessive distances between the mover's vehicle and the customer's home. For example, a 100 yard walkway from the street to the front door of the home.

Stairs: A charge for carrying items up or down flights of stairs. For example, delivery to the 5th floor of an apartment building with no functioning elevator.

Unanticipated storage: Temporary warehouse storage of the shipment pending further transportation. For example, if the consumer's new home isn't quite ready to occupy.

Rigging, hoisting, and lowering: Setting up a rope and pulley system to raise large bulky items through an upper floor window when the item will not fit through the front door. For example, an oversized couch, armoire or piano up to a second floor of an old Victorian home.

How to get an accurate estimate:

Accuracy of estimates are based in large part upon the accuracy of the information the consumer provides the estimator. Whether an estimate is given after an in-home visual inspection of the property or over the phone based upon a consumer's list of items to be moved – the accuracy depends on the information provided.

To help get an accurate estimate consumers need to fully inform the company of all items that will be moved

and the specific services needed. You should always get three written estimates to compare and check a mover's license and references. If you are going to use a professional moving company always make certain to hire a company that is properly licensed and insured. Consider the following list of tips to help ensure the accuracy of an estimate:

- Inform the estimator of all items being moved. Don't forget to list the items stored in an attic, storage unit, or garage.

- Describe in detail the physical location of the pick-up and delivery locations and inform the estimator if there will be stairs, excessively long walkways, or roadways inaccessible by a tractor trailer truck.

- Inform the estimator if you have any unusually large or bulky items being transported such as oversized pool tables, backyard playground sets, and/or large gym equipment.

- Let the estimator know if you need any special packing or wooden crating services of special items such as an antique vase or other large fragile items.

- Between the time you receive your initial estimate and the day of the move keep in contact with the estimator and provide updates if you decide to move additional items, change the services ordered, or need the movers to pack your property. Informing the estimator of changes or updates to your move before the day of the pick-up will let you see an updated estimate so you can avoid surprise price increases.

- Let the estimator know if you need to order expedited or guaranteed delivery service or if you want the less expensive standard non-guaranteed ground transport service.

Moving is a difficult, often unpleasant, and expensive process. Consumers can save money and help reduce stress by selecting the right type of service for their move and having realistic expectations of what is and is not included in the price of the moving service. Make certain to carefully review the details of the moving estimate and contract before signing.

Questions to ask the estimator before you book your move:

Does the company have active US DOT and ICC/MC license numbers?

Will the estimate be binding or non-binding?

Will final charges be based upon weight or cubic feet?

Will the company provide references from satisfied customers?

What are the charges for packing materials and labor services?

What are the charges for "full coverage insurance," and what is covered?

Which neutral arbitration program does the company participate in?

Is the estimate provided in writing and does it list all services ordered?

What are the charges for extra services such as: stairs, long carry, shuttle, storage, appliance serving, packing, etc?

Are the pickup or delivery dates guaranteed? If yes, is it in writing?

What form of payment is accepted at delivery?

How long after delivery do I have to file a claim for damages?

The information contained in this article is designed for informational purposes only and was not written or intended to constitute legal advice. Federal, state, and local laws and regulations governing the moving industry change frequently and may be interpreted differently by different people. For additional information contact:

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