

Can a consumer shipper be required to sign blank documents?

In some cases, yes. An estimate for moving services is not a contract or a guarantee. Since the final charges for the moving services cannot be determined until after the goods have been loaded and weighed (when based upon weight) many of the documents a consumer shipper is required to sign at origin will be blank and not contain the final charges. Federal law governing interstate moving specifically states in 49 CFR section 375.501(d):

[The motor carrier] may provide the individual shipper with blank or incomplete estimates, orders for service, bill of lading, or any other blank or incomplete documents pertaining to the move... You may require the individual shipper to sign an incomplete document at origin provided it contains all relevant shipping information except the actual shipment weight and another other information necessary to determine final charges for all services performed.

It is not illegal or unusually for a consumer shippers to be required to sign shipping documents at origin that do not contain the final charges; in essence are blank. However, the estimate or revised written estimate must *never* be signed blank. At the time the estimate or revised written estimate is signed it must contain an itemization of all services charges, and the total charge. A consumer shipper should never sign an estimate or revised written estimate that does not list the total estimated charges.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT: This document was created to help protect consumers by educating moving companies as to the regulations they must follow. Federal laws regulating moving companies are designed to help protect consumers and create an even playing field for moving companies. By following the law, moving companies can avoid government fines, lawsuits, and provide better service to their customers. This document is provided for general informational purposes only. This document is not intended to and does not provide legal advice or counsel. The author of this document is offering general information about the law cited and is not offering specific legal advice. Laws and procedures change frequently, and they can be interpreted differently by different people. For legal advice and answers to specific questions regarding your situation please call the Law Offices of Michael Garcia at 408-730-5683. www.michaelgarcialaw.com