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National Moving Month Event Highlights Consumer Protection

Consumer Advocates, Industry Experts and State Regulators Join Forces to Educate Texans on Consumer Rights

#MoveSafeTX

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, May 9, 2016 —Texas is the fastest growing state in the country, with hundreds of people moving to the Lone Star State every day. Unfortunately, illegal moving companies are operating statewide, taking a financial and emotional toll on Texans who find themselves faced with losing everything they own or paying a ransom to release their belongings.

At a press conference Monday morning in San Antonio, government agencies, moving industry experts and consumer advocates cautioned Texans to do their homework before hiring a moving company. Leaders with the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV), Southwest Movers Association (SMA), American Moving & Storage Association (AMSA) and Better Business Bureau (BBB) serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin encouraged consumers to take note of their rights and responsibilities.

“May marks the beginning of the busiest moving season of the year; a time that can be riddled with illegal and unethical, fly-by-night operators preying on unsuspecting Texans,” said Southwest Movers Association Executive Director John D. Esparza, the state association representing licensed movers. “At a time of record growth for our state, it is important to educate new as well as native Texans on the moving standards they should expect.”

More than 35 million Americans move annually. Texas welcomes more than 400 new residents daily, and the state ranks number one for inbound moves. Unfortunately, since 2012, Texas’ largest cities have consistently found their way into the annual top 10 cities nationwide for consumer moving complaints.

That ranking is changing. While moving complaints nationally are on the rise, in Texas, those numbers are improving thanks to laws passed stiffening fines and penalties. That includes jail time for repeat offenses committed by illegal operators. TxDMV’s enforcement investigators have also taken on an expanded role in assisting the federal government with interstate complaints, and putting unlicensed movers on notice that any attempts to operate in Texas will not be tolerated by the state.

“TxDMV is determined to make Texas one of safest states in which consumers hire a moving company,” said Whitney Brewster, the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles’ Executive Director. “Unlicensed movers are rogue operators who are not legitimate moving companies. We urge consumers to protect themselves by visiting Truck Stop on www.TxDmv.gov before they move to verify if a mover is licensed in Texas.”

There are more than 7,000 moving companies nationwide and more than 800 licensed movers in Texas. In 2015, TxDMV received 451 complaints against movers, 170 of those were for unlicensed movers. This year, TxDMV has received 328 complaints, 245 of those were for unlicensed movers.

“For many of us, it’s difficult to put a price tag on some of the personal items we have in our home or office. That’s why it is so important to do your research before hiring any business to move your belongings,” said Carrie A. Hurt, President and CEO for BBB serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin. “While there are many moving companies that are trustworthy, it only takes picking the wrong one to put you in a bad situation.”

Last year, BBB received more than 11,000 complaints about movers nationwide. Many of those complaints alleged pricing issues, delivery issues, lost or damaged property and uncooperative employees. BBB has business reviews on over 700 moving companies in their 97-county service area. Choosing a BBB Accredited Business tells consumers that business abides by a strict set of eight standards for trust that range from making sure the business is advertising honestly, to safeguarding the privacy of their customers.

With so many things on the move “to-do list,” people often don’t spend the time investigating who they are about to hire. Equipping Texans with accessible tools and educating them on their rights has moved Texas from the third worst state in the country for moving scams to sixth in 2014.

Don’t Make a Move Without Us, a campaign launched by TxDMV, is part of that toolbox as is FMCSA’s Protect Your Move campaign, the first partnership between federal, state and local officials, and the moving industry.

The American Moving & Storage Association and Southwest Movers Association have also created certification programs to help fight back against moving company imposters, certifying elite moving companies committed to honest and ethical business practices, and designating them as either Pinnacle Movers or ProMovers.

“Hiring a professional mover is a smart decision that saves time and effort while providing the best protection for your household goods. Consumers should choose a moving company they can trust, and that company must be licensed,” said Scott Michael, president and CEO of the American Moving & Storage Association in Alexandria, Va., the industry’s national trade group. “We want consumers to be confident they’ve chosen a mover committed to honest and ethical business practices—a certified ProMover.”

Moving fraud is preventable and the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV), Southwest Movers Association (SMA) and Better Business Bureau (BBB) serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin offered all consumers important steps to take before moving as well as helpful tools to use during and after a move.

“Laws and investigations help consumers after they have a problem, but the only one who can make sure illegal moving companies don’t have any business is you,” Brewster said.

Consumer Awareness Tips

Texas law requires:

- A mover to be actively licensed with TxDMV and USDOT.
- A valid TxDMV or USDOT number must be displayed on the moving truck.

A mover must give consumers:

- A written proposal or estimate that shows either a guaranteed flat price (binding amount) or a “not to exceed” maximum amount for the move.
- A written and signed contract before the move begins.
- Standard liability of 60 cents per pound per item. (Note: It is unlikely standard liability will cover the cost of your item. Some movers offer the option to purchase an increased liability amount for goods or you can purchase insurance that will cover the cost of your possessions.)
- A brochure that outlines your Rights & Responsibilities under Texas law.
- Another copy of the contract upon completion of the move. This contract should include the total charge for the move; an itemized list of what the charges are for; and the method used to calculate the charges. If you decide to alter the original contract, the moving company must write an amendment that outlines any additional charges and services. You and the moving company representative must sign and date the amended contract.

Always remember:

- Hire a licensed mover with a valid TxDMV and USDOT number.

- Check the company's license status at TxDMV's Truck Stop at www.TxDMV.gov. For out of state moves, visit FMCSA's www.protectyourmove.gov.
- Never accept a verbal quote or agreement. Get everything in writing, signed and dated.
- Use reputable, online sources when looking for a mover: www.mytexasmover.com, www.bbb.org, www.movers.org, when looking for a professional moving company.
- ProMovers (AMSA certification) and Pinnacle Movers (SMA Certification) are elite groups of movers held to high standards of service, conduct and ethics within the industry. Visit Moving.org or MyTexasMover.com.
- BBB Accredited Businesses abide by BBB's eight Standards for Trust, which includes advertising honestly, honoring promises, safeguarding privacy and telling the truth. For a list of BBB accredited movers in your area, visit CheckBBB.org.

If you have a problem:

- Call your local police if a mover attempts to hold your items hostage for additional payment not in your contract or threatens to drive off with your belongings.
- Always file a complaint with both the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles and Better Business Bureau.

For additional tips and information, visit:

- Better Business Bureau serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin, BBB.org/Central-Texas
- Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, TxDMV.gov
- Southwest Movers Association, MyTexasMover.com
- American Moving & Storage Association, Moving.org

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