

# Experts share ways to cut moving costs

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By PAMELA YIP / The Dallas Morning News

Moving always costs more than you think, and not just because of the unanticipated costs.

"One of the single largest expenses that most of us don't anticipate is the physical cost of moving our belongings," says Ron Phipps, a real estate broker at Phipps Realty in Warwick, R.I., and a liaison for the president of the National Association of Realtors.

Even if your employer is helping, you still may have to shoulder some expenses.

"Many moves, even if paid for by an employer, are being capped in expenses or may incur some expenses not covered," says Bryan Clintsman, a certified financial planner and head of Clintsman Financial Planning in Southlake.

Here are some tips for cutting your moving costs:

- Get estimates from at least three moving companies well in advance.

Ask your friends to recommend moving companies they have been happy with and check out the companies' records with the Better Business Bureau of Metropolitan Dallas.

"When moving locally, it's done on an hourly basis," says Richard Eschbacher, president of Suddath Relocation Systems in Dallas, an agent of United Van Lines. "When moving interstate, the cost is based on weight."

- Know your rights.

Movers must give you an estimate in writing. Insist on a binding estimate.

"The single most important thing is to make sure that they get a guaranteed, written, not-to-exceed estimate," Mr. Eschbacher says.

Be sure that the estimate has all relevant shipping information, except the actual shipment weight, and any other information necessary to determine the final charges for all services performed.

If you agree to a nonbinding estimate, at least confirm in writing the method of payment.

- Nail down when the movers will pick up and deliver your goods.

"You want the moving company to guarantee a date – what day they will load you and what date they will deliver you," Mr. Eschbacher says. "You want a choice of a couple of days based on *your* schedule, not the movers.' "

Insist ahead of time that the mover reimburse you if your belongings aren't picked up or delivered on the promised date.

"Consider a mover with a large fleet," Mr. Eschbacher says. "Companies with larger fleets can guarantee delivery dates. Otherwise, you may need to stay a few nights in a hotel, which is a hidden cost that adds to the move's overall cost."

- Understand movers' responsibility for loss or damage.

## Carrying the costs

Moving ranks as one of the most stressful events in a person's life – right up there with a death in the family and divorce.

Compounding the stress is the high cost. If there's a constant when it comes to moving, it's that it always costs more than you think.

Regardless of whether you or your employer is paying the movers' fees, consider these other costs before you undertake a move. That at least will let you try to minimize them:

**Fixing up your new place:** "Moving almost always involves redoing a house to make it fit your personality," says Bryan Clintsman, head of Clintsman Financial Planning in Southlake. "Furniture, painting, wallpaper, landscaping – all of these are typically not included when determining the costs of a new house."

**Setting up utilities:** "Many new services might require deposits," Mr. Clintsman says. "Many times these are not reimbursable by an employer."

**Keeping two households:** "If the employee goes, and the family is still trying to finish something up, then the worker will end up waiting for the family," says Kay Burd of Runzheimer International, a management consulting firm.

**Dining out:** "You've got to live, and you've got to eat," says Ron Phipps, a real estate broker. "Either you're dog tired from doing the move or you just don't have the tools."

**Establishing a routine:**

According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, a mover is legally liable for loss or damage that occurs during the transportation of goods and the delivery of services listed on the shipping and transport document.

However, hazardous, perishable or dangerous materials, or shipping goods that exceed the per-pound dollar amount, can limit or reduce the mover's liability.

- Pack the nonbreakable stuff yourself, if you want. But let the movers pack the fragile things.

"If the mover doesn't pack it, the mover is not liable for damage, unless it's due to negligence," says Kelly O'Connor, vice president of sales and marketing at Daryl Flood Warehouse & Movers in Dallas, an agent of Allied Van Lines

- Consider purchasing some type of "valuation" insurance coverage from the moving company, in case your goods are damaged or lost.

Moving companies are required to assume liability for the value of the goods they transport, but there are different levels of liability.

Valuation coverage ranges from \$100 to \$500, depending on how much value you put on your goods, Mr. Eschbacher says.

- Hold a garage sale or donate to charity.

"The best way to save money is to reduce the volume of the weight you're shipping," Mr. O'Connor says. "Get rid of the stuff you haven't used for years."

- If you're paying for your move, take advantage of tax breaks associated with moving expenses.

"If you moved because of a change in your job location or because you started a new job, you may be able to deduct your moving expenses if your move is closely related to the start of work," says Phil Beasley, spokesman for the Internal Revenue Service in Dallas.

But you must meet IRS requirements for distance and time. Your new job location must be at least 50 miles farther from your former home than your old job location was. See a tax adviser for details.

If you meet the IRS requirements, you may deduct the "reasonable" expenses of moving your stuff. You may also deduct the expenses of traveling, including lodging. However, you can't deduct meals.

- When it comes to buying your new home, make sure to account for extra expenditures other than the actual cost of the house.

"If you're buying a \$250,000 house and you put down \$50,000 and you think, 'All I need is \$50,000,' you need more than \$50,000 for all of your ancillary expenses like closing costs," says Mr. Phipps, the real estate broker.

Finally, take the process one step at a time and realize that there's also an emotional component to moving.

"Transitions by definition are very hard," Mr. Phipps says. "The process is daunting. It takes longer ... to move stuff than you anticipate."

"Living expenses will often go up for several weeks as people live out of boxes and cannot get settled into a family eat-at-home routine, taking laundry to the cleaners, etc.," Mr. Clintman says. "Banking relationships must also be adjusted."

**Being an outsider:** In a new town, it takes a while to find the best places to shop, eat, get your car fixed, etc. Meanwhile, you pay for your ignorance.

*Pamela Yip*

## STATISTICS

Moving is a way of life in this country:

- The average American moves 11 times in a lifetime.
- Seventeen to 20 percent of the U.S. population moves in a given year.
- Three out of four movers are do-it-yourselfers.
- Almost 45 percent of moves occur between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

## RESOURCES

– [www.moving.org](http://www.moving.org) The American Moving and Storage Association represents the moving and storage industry.

– [www.dallas.bbb.org](http://www.dallas.bbb.org) You can use the Better Business Bureau of Metropolitan Dallas to check out moving companies. Click on "Reports." Or call 214-220-2000.

– [www.dot.state.tx.us](http://www.dot.state.tx.us) This is the Web site of the Texas Department of Transportation. Click on "Household Movers."

– [www.southwestmovers.org](http://www.southwestmovers.org)  
– This is the Southwest Movers Association's site. Click on "Consumer Guidelines."

– [www.fmcsa.dot.gov/factsfig/moving.htm](http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/factsfig/moving.htm) The

E-mail [pyip@dallasnews.com](mailto:pyip@dallasnews.com)

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration regulates interstate household goods movers and requires them to register with the agency.

*SOURCES: U-Haul International Inc.; Dallas Morning News research; Nancy Granovsky, family economics specialist at Texas A&M University*