

Vetting Your Mover Guide

A simple, practical checklist for checking safety records, authority, insurance, reputation, and professionalism before you hire a moving company.

Moving Buddies Tucson AZ

Short Description

A straightforward consumer guide that shows customers how to vet a moving company by checking FMCSA Company Snapshot safety records, registration status, insurance, reviews, complaint patterns, commercial insurance, drug-testing policies, paperwork, and basic professionalism before booking.

Meta Title

Vetting Your Mover Guide | FMCSA Safety Checks & Red Flags

Meta Description

Learn how to vet a moving company using FMCSA Company Snapshot, mover registration, insurance checks, reviews, red flags, drug-testing questions, and paperwork basics.

Introduction

Vetting a mover does not need to be complicated. You do not need a private investigator, a spreadsheet full of mystery metrics, or a dozen phone calls. You mainly need to confirm that the company is real, properly identified, commercially insured, transparent about who performs the work, and visible in the public safety records that matter.

The most important step is checking the company in FMCSA resources. FMCSA says its Company Snapshot is a free public service that shows a company's identification, cargo information, inspection and out-of-service summary, crash data, and safety rating if one exists. FMCSA also provides a registered mover search for interstate movers that can show registration status, business type, complaint information, and safety information.

For local moves, you still want to run the same basic checks when a mover has a USDOT number or commercial vehicles. For interstate moves, do not skip them. Interstate household-goods movers must be registered with the federal government and have a U.S. DOT number.

The Simple Vetting Rule

A good mover should be easy to verify.

The company name should match. The phone number should make sense. The address should make sense. The USDOT number should lead to the company you are speaking with. The paperwork should match the company identity. The estimate should be clear. The insurance answers should be specific. The review pattern should look like a real operating company, not a temporary sales operation.

If basic facts are hard to confirm, that is the vetting result.

Step 1: Get the exact company identity

Before you check anything, ask the mover for its exact legal information. Do not rely only on the website name. Moving companies may use a legal name, a DBA name, a brand name, or a local marketing name.

Ask for:

- Legal business name
- DBA name, if different
- USDOT number, if applicable
- MC number, if applicable
- Physical business address
- Main phone number
- Website
- Whether they are a carrier, broker, or labor-only provider

This matters because you cannot vet a company accurately if you are searching the wrong name. If the mover gives you one name on the phone, another name in email, another name on the estimate, and another name in FMCSA records, pause before booking.

Step 2: Check FMCSA Company Snapshot

This is the core move.

Go to the FMCSA SAFER Company Snapshot search. Search by USDOT number first. A number is cleaner than a name search because names can be similar, abbreviated, or entered differently. FMCSA states the Company Snapshot can be searched by DOT number, MC/MX number, or company name.

When the record opens, review these fields:

- Legal name and DBA name
- Physical address
- Phone number
- Entity type or carrier status
- Operating status

- Power units
- Drivers
- Cargo carried
- Safety rating, if any
- Inspection history
- Out-of-service rates
- Crash information

The goal is not to become a transportation compliance expert. The goal is to see whether the public record matches the company you think you are hiring.

How to read the Company Snapshot like a customer

Start with identity. Does the legal name match the estimate? Does the DBA match the brand? Does the address look connected to the company? Does the phone number make sense?

Then look at operating status. If the company shows an inactive, out-of-service, or inconsistent status, ask questions before hiring.

Then look at size. A company claiming to be a large fleet but showing very few power units may not be telling the full story. A small company is not automatically bad, but the public record should not contradict the sales pitch.

Then look at inspections and crashes. A record with some inspections is normal for commercial carriers. What you are looking for is an obvious pattern of concern, unusually high out-of-service results, or information that conflicts with how the company describes itself.

Finally, remember that no safety rating does not automatically mean unsafe. Many smaller carriers may not have a formal safety rating. Treat the Company Snapshot as a verification tool, not a single yes-or-no score.

Step 3: Use FMCSA Protect Your Move for interstate moves

If your shipment crosses state lines, use FMCSA Protect Your Move. FMCSA says its mover search tool is designed to confirm whether an interstate mover is registered. The tool can show headquarters location, contact information, registration status, business type, complaint information, and safety information.

This is where you confirm whether the company is a household-goods carrier, broker, freight forwarder, or another type of business. That distinction matters. A carrier transports your goods. A broker arranges transportation with another company. A broker can be legal, but it should not pretend to be the company physically performing the move.

Ask the company directly: Are you the carrier performing the move, or are you arranging the move with another carrier?

Step 4: Check FMCSA Licensing and Insurance

For interstate for-hire carriers, FMCSA Licensing and Insurance records can be used to check operating authority information. FMCSA describes the Licensing and Insurance carrier search as a public tool for interstate for-hire carriers with granted authority or pending applications. FMCSA also says companies with operating authority must maintain required proof of insurance and designation of agents for process on file to avoid revocation proceedings.

For household-goods motor carriers, FMCSA guidance says they must file proof of both public liability and cargo insurance to obtain interstate operating authority.

Customer translation: for an interstate mover, you should not accept vague insurance claims only. Ask what insurance they carry, what is filed where applicable, and what valuation or liability options apply to your goods.

Commercial insurance questions to ask

Ask simple, direct questions:

- Do you carry commercial auto insurance?
- Do you carry general liability insurance?
- Do you carry cargo coverage where applicable?
- Do you carry workers' compensation or occupational accident coverage for crews?
- Can you provide a certificate of insurance when required by a building, apartment, or commercial property?
- What protection applies if my goods are damaged?
- What is valuation, and how is it different from insurance?

A professional mover should understand these questions. You are not asking for trade secrets. You are asking whether the company is operating like a real business.

Step 5: Ask about drug testing and safety policies

Drug testing is not something most customers ask about, but it is a fair professionalism question, especially when a company operates commercial vehicles. FMCSA explains that drivers of commercial motor vehicles have drug and alcohol testing rules, and DOT-wide rules govern how testing is conducted and how employees return to safety-sensitive duties after violations.

Ask the mover:

- Do drivers who are subject to DOT rules participate in a compliant drug and alcohol testing program?
- Do you have written safety policies for drivers and crews?
- Do you background check employees or screen new hires?
- Are crews employees, contractors, day labor, or subcontractors?

- Who supervises the crew on moving day?

Not every mover is operating the same type of vehicle or doing the same type of move, so the exact requirements can vary. The point is not to interrogate the company. The point is to see whether they can answer safety questions clearly.

Step 6: Verify local presence

A real local mover should be locally verifiable. That does not mean every company needs a giant warehouse or showroom, but there should be a stable identity.

Check:

- Google Business Profile
- Website consistency
- Address consistency
- Phone number consistency
- Photos of real crews or trucks
- Local reviews over time
- Local service-area references
- State business records when available

FMCSA lists poor or nonexistent offices and warehouses as moving red flags, along with phone calls answered generically as "Movers" or "Moving Company" instead of the company name. For a local move, a company that looks local online but cannot explain where it operates from deserves extra scrutiny.

Step 7: Read reviews for patterns, not perfection

Do not just look at the star rating. Look for repeated patterns.

Good signs:

- Reviews mention specific crew members
- Reviews describe local neighborhoods or realistic move situations
- Reviews appear over a long period of time
- The company responds professionally
- Complaints are addressed instead of ignored

Warning patterns:

- Repeated price increases
- Deposit complaints
- No-shows

- Last-minute cancellation
- Different company showing up
- Damage complaints with no response
- Hostage-load language
- Sudden flood of vague five-star reviews
- Many reviews that sound generic

BBB recommends researching movers, verifying credentials, getting agreements in writing, and using movers with a trusted reputation. BBB also notes that professional movers often wear uniforms, undergo background checks, and provide order numbers or tracking information.

Step 8: Compare the paperwork to the sales conversation

The estimate should match what you were told.

Check for:

- Correct company name
- Correct addresses
- Correct move date
- Correct services
- Crew size or pricing method
- Minimum charges
- Travel charges
- Packing or material charges
- Stairs, elevators, or long-carry terms
- Valuation or liability options
- Cancellation policy
- Deposit terms
- Payment terms

The FTC warns consumers not to hire movers who ask them to sign paperwork with blank spaces for prices, dates, signatures, or other important information, and not to hire companies that demand cash or a big deposit before the move.

Step 9: Confirm who will actually show up

This is one of the most important vetting questions.

Ask:

- Will your company's crew show up?
- Are the movers employees or contractors?
- Will the truck have your company name or markings?
- Do you ever subcontract moves?
- If another company arrives, am I required to use them?
- Who handles claims if something is damaged?

A rental truck does not automatically mean a scam, but surprise rental trucks, surprise subcontractors, or surprise company names are not good signs. FMCSA includes rental trucks arriving instead of a company-owned or marked fleet truck among its red flags.

Step 10: Ask for references only when needed

For most ordinary local moves, public reviews and public records are usually enough. For higher-risk moves, ask for references or proof of relevant experience.

Ask for more evidence when you have:

- A large home
- A long-distance move
- A senior move
- Fine art
- Heavy items
- Appliances
- Office equipment
- A strict building requirement
- A high-value shipment

References should sound real and relevant. A mover that claims to specialize in heavy items, offices, senior moves, or long-distance service should be able to explain that process in practical terms.

The quick vetting checklist

Before booking, confirm:

- Legal name and DBA
- USDOT number, if applicable
- MC number, if applicable
- FMCSA Company Snapshot record
- Registered mover status for interstate moves
- Carrier versus broker role

- Licensing and insurance status where applicable
- Commercial auto, liability, cargo, and workers' compensation answers
- Drug testing or safety policy answers where applicable
- Local address and phone consistency
- Review patterns
- Written estimate
- Written terms
- Valuation or liability explanation
- Deposit and payment terms
- Who physically performs the move

If the company passes these basics, you are usually dealing with a more transparent operation. If it cannot pass these basics, keep looking.

Green flags

Look for movers that:

- Give their legal name without hesitation
- Provide a USDOT number when applicable
- Explain carrier versus broker status clearly
- Have public records that match their identity
- Explain insurance and valuation plainly
- Put pricing terms in writing
- Have consistent local reviews
- Use clear company branding
- Answer safety questions professionally
- Do not pressure you into a fast deposit
- Do not ask for blank signatures
- Explain what could change the price

The best movers are not hard to vet.

Red flags

Pause if you see:

- No written estimate
- Blank paperwork
- Cash-only demands

- Large upfront deposit
- Vague company identity
- Mismatched business names
- No clear address
- Generic phone answer
- Broker role hidden or avoided
- No explanation of insurance
- No clear damage-claim process
- Different company scheduled to show up
- Reviews about hostage goods or price jumps
- FMCSA records that do not match the company
- Pressure tactics

One red flag may not prove fraud. Several red flags together tell you enough.

Final takeaway

Vetting a mover is simple because the fundamentals are simple.

Verify the identity. Check FMCSA Company Snapshot. Use Protect Your Move for interstate moves. Check authority and insurance where applicable. Ask who performs the move. Read review patterns. Ask about commercial insurance, driver safety, and drug-testing policies when relevant. Make sure the paperwork matches the promise.

A professional mover will not be offended by basic verification.

The companies that resist simple questions are usually the companies you should avoid.

Sources

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<https://consumer.ftc.gov/consumer-alerts/2024/09/avoid-scams-when-you-hire-moving-company>

BBB Hiring a Mover: <https://www.bbb.org/all/moving/hiring-a-mover>