



# International Moving

FEDERAL MARITIME COMMISSION



## Protecting Your International Move

This brochure provides important information to help you have a safe and efficient international relocation, when your move involves moving your household goods to or from the U.S. via ocean vessel. For specific guidance on shipping vehicles, small packages, or other items, please consult the Federal Maritime Commission's (FMC's) website at [www.fmc.gov](http://www.fmc.gov).

## The Importance of Hiring a Reputable Mover

Hiring a reputable mover is the first line of defense in protecting your personal goods and/or vehicles. Consumers are often surprised to learn that movers use several subcontractors. Often, the mover that you hire does not see or physically handle your goods. However, your mover will be responsible for coordinating, overseeing, and paying: trucking companies, warehouses, ocean shipping lines, and other ocean transportation intermediaries within the course of an international move.

Because of the various steps in performing an international move, it is important to hire licensed movers that have sufficient knowledge and experience. Under federal law, movers must be licensed or registered with the FMC as either a freight forwarder or non-vessel-operating common carrier. To obtain a license from the FMC, movers must demonstrate that they have a minimum level of knowledge of shipping industry requirements and practices.

Both licensed and registered movers must maintain a bond. In the event that you have a transportation related dispute with your mover, you can file a claim against the bond.

## International Moving Checklist

- Make a list of all items that you intend to ship.
- Consult FMC's consumer resource page, [www.fmc.gov](http://www.fmc.gov), to locate FMC licensed movers.
- Check with the Commission's Office of Consumer Affairs and Dispute Resolution Services (CADRS) as well as state consumer protection agencies or the Better Business Bureau to confirm that the mover does not have a history of unresolved complaints.
- Obtain written quotes based on an onsite inspection.
- Read and understand your mover's terms and conditions of service.
- Obtain additional insurance if necessary.
- Ask your mover to make a list of all items packed and number each box packed.
- Obtain a receipt from the company that picks up your goods.
- Check your voicemail/email daily for updates on move status.
- Check your goods as soon as they are delivered to make sure that no boxes are missing or damaged. Immediately report any missing or damaged items to your mover. Photograph any damaged goods.

## Cautionary Signs

Ensuring that a company is FMC licensed or registered is an important first step in protecting your goods. However, other factors should be considered when selecting a mover. Be wary of the following practices or situations:

- Mover claims that it is not required to have an FMC license
- Mover's website does not list a local address (or any address at all)
- Mover's quote is significantly lower than other providers
- Mover charges a fee for credit card use or refuses credit card payments
- Mover has what appears to be an excessive cancellation penalty or fee
- Mover claims to provide insurance, but fails to include a copy of the policy
- Mover has a record of numerous complaints with the BBB or other agencies



## Understanding Cubic Volume and Price

- Movers charge by the amount of space (cubic volume) that your shipment occupies.
- Movers frequently provide computer or phone based estimates. These quotes do not include additional space used for packing materials.
- Anticipate potential increases in volume; ask your mover to address such increases in your initial quote.
- If a dispute arises regarding additional charges based upon additional space, ask your mover to have a third party measure your shipment.

## Packing

- International shipments require additional packing to protect them against transit conditions, such as inclement weather.
- Many insurance companies will only insure your shipment if it is professionally packed by the mover or its subcontractor.
- Your mover may need to palletize your shipment to provide additional protection. Palletizing protects your goods from shifting in transit and may provide additional protection against the elements.
- Palletizing may also add cubic volume to your shipment, resulting in additional cost.
- If you are shipping your vehicle, make sure that you follow your mover's instructions with respect to providing title documents for customs clearance, and removing items from the car and emptying your gas tank prior to shipping.

## Insurance

- Because federal law may limit your mover's liability for loss or damage to your goods, obtaining insurance is a good way to protect against loss or damage to your goods.
- Review the terms and conditions of the insurance offered, as some policies only provide protection in the case of total loss of a vessel. Under such policies, routine damage to goods that occur in transit may not be covered.
- Marine insurance policies are usually provided by third parties, not your mover.
- Request a copy of any marine insurance policy that has been purchased on your behalf.
- Although unusual, another option for insuring your overseas shipment may be your existing home owner's or renter's policy. Check your policy to see if it provides protection against loss or damage of your goods during an international move.

## Customs Requirements

- International moves of certain personal effects and/or vehicles may require customs clearance in the U.S. and at destination.
- Research requirements prior to moving.
- Ask the mover if it provides customs clearance services as part of its shipping services as well as the cost for such services.
- You can obtain additional information regarding US customs requirements at: <http://www.cbp.gov>.



## Documentation

Obtain receipts from both your mover and the trucking company that picks up your household goods for shipment. These receipts should identify the name and address of the mover and trucking company. If there is a problem, it will be easier to locate your shipment. Also, if you are shipping a vehicle, make sure that you maintain a copy of your vehicle title if you are asked to submit your vehicle title for customs clearance.

## Available Assistance

The FMC's CADRS Staff can answer general questions regarding hiring a mover, preparing for your international move, or about a particular mover.

If you encounter a specific problem involving your shipment, you should first attempt to contact your mover. If your efforts to resolve a problem are unsuccessful, CADRS may be able to assist you in resolving your dispute with your mover and/or its subcontractors.

Some examples of disputes handled by CADRS include:

- Shipment delays
- Locating lost cargo
- Lack of communication from the mover regarding shipment status and/or location
- Unexpected increases in rates and charges
- Refusal by a mover's subcontractor to deliver a shipment
- When contacting CADRS for assistance, please be prepared to provide the following:
  - Your name and contact information
  - A summary of the complaint

- Name and contact information of your mover
- Any documentation that you have relating to the shipment

Upon receiving your complaint, CADRS will contact you and the mover to seek informal resolution of the complaint. While informal complaint resolution is usually the fastest way to resolve complaints, CADRS also offers other, more formalized dispute resolution services, such as: mediation, binding arbitration, and small claims proceedings involving Shipping Act violations.

CADRS staff is available to assist parties Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. eastern time. To request assistance, please contact CADRS:

(866) 448-9586 (toll free)  
(202) 523-5807 (local)  
(202) 275-0059 (fax)  
[complaints@fmc.gov](mailto:complaints@fmc.gov)

For more information on the dispute resolution services offered by CADRS, please visit: [www.fmc.gov](http://www.fmc.gov)

**WWW.FMC.GOV**



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