

William R. Coffin & Sons, Inc.

“The Real Deal” on Trash Removal

Regardless of which companies you interview for your trash removal services, be sure to get the information you need by asking the right questions.

Top questions to answer before picking a trash removal firm:

1. What are the total Setup Costs? Is there an installation fee for the equipment? Is there an administration fee for setting up the account? Are there any annual fees which will be charged after service begins? Also, you may have exit fees with your current hauler that need to be considered.

2. Is a signed Service Agreement/Contract required? Independent small businesses usually don't deal in contracts, have open rates, tend to keep those rates longer and have fewer, if any, additional fees. All national haulers have mandatory contracts. Rates that are locked-in with pre-programmed price increases and numerous, additional fees will lead to higher overall costs over time. If the contract does not contain *opt out clauses for all fee and price increases*, it should not be signed.

3. Is pricing done on a Per Pickup basis or a Monthly lump-sum basis? Per pickup pricing is easier to monitor and verify due to the charges being broken down by date on monthly statements. Monthly lump-sum pricing means actual service dates are not listed on statements making verification of service difficult. Also, is the rate quote monthly or for 4 weeks? A 4-week quote will be cheaper, but could generate 13 bills for a 52-week year.

4. Is there a set rate for additional pickups? Is it the same as the per pickup rate? Regarding contracts, if the actual figure is not specified, it could be anything.

5. Are additional fees based on something specific? For instance, at what point do additional fuel surcharges start? At what rate are they imposed? Or, is a number just picked out of a hat?

6. Is equipment maintained on a regular basis? And at whose cost? And what about damage to equipment? Some companies do routine maintenance as the regular part of doing business. However, some contracts specify that costs of container maintenance or replacement will be billed to the customer. This included damages to the equipment while at the customers site.

7. Does the company have the Exclusive Rights to removal of all waste created? For instance, if you have a special construction project at your location, can you get estimates from other haulers, or, are you legally obligated to use your current provider irregardless of what the potential extra charges might be?

8. What is the Early Payment Discount? What is the late payment fee? An early payment discount can add up to huge potential savings.

9. Are Schedules Flexible? Are there fees for altering a schedule? If your business has times of the year when it is busier or slower than normal, it's important to be able to adjust scheduling requirements. Business that offer per pickup pricing can easily do this. Contracted services can disallow this practice or charge a fee for every scheduling change.

10. Is there Pre-Notification of Contract Renewal Dates? Every trash removal contract in Massachusetts will self-renew for its original specified term (usually 2 or 3 years) at the end of its current term. And this *continues forever* unless the customer contacts the hauler (by registered letter) within a specified number of days (usually 30 or 60) before the contract ends. Currently, Massachusetts does not require haulers to notify customers when the renewal period is about to occur. Will you remember when the time comes?

11. Does the contract have an Opt-Out Fee? Sadly, many contracts do not have this option. The ones that do, usually state the opt-out fee would be the equivalent of anywhere from *3 to 6 months of normal service*.

12. Did you read the contract or take the salespersons' word? The salesperson's primary reason to get you to sign the contract is to earn their commission. If you have a question about the contract, read it yourself, have someone else read it, have your legal representative read it, but don't take the salespersons' word. Remember, once you've signed the contract, what the salesman said will have no bearing on what the contract actually says.

13. Did you check with other businesses who have dealt with this hauler? What have they experienced when dealing with this hauler? Is the pricing originally promised actually maintained? Are there additional fees being imposed? Is service great or just okay? Is equipment maintained? Are schedules adhered to or constantly altered? Are extra services done in a timely fashion and at a reasonable rate?

If you do your due diligence, you'll be able to find a hauler that will fit your needs at a reasonable price with no surprise fees and long term requirements or commitments. If you don't, you could regret it for each and every day of that long-term contract.

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