

## # Documented billing practices and leadership concerns at 1800 Packrat and Zippy Shell

An investigation into Mark Kuhns (CEO), Gareth Taylor (President), and Kevin Barbour (COO) reveals systematic billing issues and questionable business practices at both 1-800-PACK-RAT and Zippy Shell that may be relevant to legal proceedings.[1][2][3] Both companies, which merged in 2018 under private equity firm Virgo Investment Group, exhibit documented patterns of hidden fees, deceptive billing practices, and poor customer service that align with broader moving industry fraud concerns identified by federal authorities.[4][5]

The evidence includes direct employee testimony about being instructed to hide charges from customers, hundreds of documented consumer complaints, a \$1.6 million class action settlement for privacy violations, and business practices that federal investigators have identified as fraud indicators in the moving industry.[6][7] Despite public statements about customer service excellence from these executives, both companies maintain extremely low satisfaction ratings (1.3-1.4 stars) across multiple platforms.[8][9][10]

### **## Systematic billing deception revealed through customer complaints**

Research across Better Business Bureau records, consumer review platforms, and legal databases reveals consistent patterns of billing-related complaints spanning 2018-2025.[11][12][13] Both companies employ similar tactics that begin with **\*\*low initial quotes followed by numerous undisclosed fees\*\***. Common hidden charges include fuel surcharges (\$100+), storage fees disguised as "rental fees" (\$300+), and additional charges for stairs, elevators, or long hallways (\$75 each).[14] One documented case shows a customer quoted \$2,600 ultimately paying \$3,225 after various fees were added post-contract.[15]

The companies' billing structure creates particular vulnerabilities for customers. Zippy Shell requires **\*\*50% payment two days before delivery\*\***, with the second payment due when the container reaches the warehouse OR 31 days after initial delivery - whichever comes first.[16] This front-loaded payment structure, combined with the companies physically holding customers' belongings, creates leverage for extracting additional payments. Multiple customers report their belongings being held "hostage" pending payment of disputed charges.[17][18]

Specific documented tactics include **\*\*promotional discount disputes\*\*** where advertised 50% discounts apply only to the first month despite contract language suggesting otherwise, **\*\*double billing\*\*** where customers are charged twice for the same service, and **\*\*continued billing after cancellation\*\*** with one customer reporting being charged for "Storage at Origin" despite never using the service.[19][20] The BBB profiles show mixed resolution rates, with many complaints marked as "business failed to respond." [21]

## **## Employee testimony confirms management directives to deceive**

Internal employee accounts provide the most damaging evidence of intentional deception. A Glassdoor review states explicitly: "Focus on making more money to the point they \*\*add hidden charges to customer invoices, but insist employees don't disclose them at the point of sale\*\*." [22] Multiple Indeed reviews corroborate this, with one employee stating "You have to lie and upsell customers telling them dishonest information" and another calling it "the most unethical company I've ever worked for." [23][24]

The pressure to engage in deceptive practices comes directly from management through \*\*commission structures that reward hiding true costs\*\*.[25] Employees report being "cheated out of commission using bait and switch tactics" and describe a corporate culture where managers receive bonuses for meeting revenue targets while pressuring staff to conceal fees.[26] The high turnover rate and numerous reviews citing ethical concerns suggest systematic rather than isolated issues.[27]

Employee stress specifically relates to billing practices, with one review identifying "Billing dealing with metrics of the company" as the most stressful aspect of the job. [28] The testimony reveals a disconnect between the sales process, where employees are instructed to minimize fee disclosure, and the billing process, where additional charges are added post-contract.[29]

## **## Legal actions and regulatory context**

While no major regulatory actions specifically target billing practices, the companies face other legal challenges. Most notably, \*\*1-800-PACK-RAT settled a class action lawsuit for \$1.6 million in 2024\*\* for illegally recording customer calls without consent in violation of California's two-party consent law.[30] This settlement demonstrates the companies' willingness to violate consumer protection laws when profitable.

Federal court records show additional litigation, including \*\*Gareth Taylor being named as a plaintiff\*\* in ZIPPY SHELL, INC. v. JOHN PEARSON (2022), a case involving arbitration and punitive damages.[31] Multiple contract dispute cases in Florida federal courts suggest ongoing legal challenges beyond consumer complaints.[32][33]

The timing is significant given federal enforcement efforts. \*\*Operation Protect Your Move\*\* , launched in 2023 following investigative journalism exposing moving industry fraud, targets companies with high complaint volumes - a category both companies clearly fit.[34] The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration reports that consumer complaints about movers more than doubled from 3,030 in 2015 to 7,647 in 2022, with these companies contributing to those statistics.[35]

## **## Executive statements contradict documented practices**

The three executives maintain impressive professional credentials that make their involvement in these practices particularly notable. **Mark Kuhns**, with 30+ years experience including senior roles at UPS and US Airways, publicly promotes a company motto of "be the best part of your customer's day."<sup>[36]</sup> In a 2024 CEO Publication interview, he emphasized "ensuring we provide top-notch customer service from start to finish" and working "with customers to find solutions that fit their budget."<sup>[37]</sup>

**Gareth Taylor**, who co-founded Zippy Shell with an elite strategy consulting background from Marakon Associates, has overseen the company's expansion while these billing practices proliferated.<sup>[38]</sup> **Kevin Barbour**, as COO, directly oversees the operations generating these complaints, despite colleague testimonials praising his dedication and expertise.<sup>[39]</sup>

The disconnect between executive rhetoric and customer reality is stark. While Kuhns speaks of "building and maintaining a positive company culture,"<sup>[40]</sup> employees describe being forced to lie to customers. While claiming to offer competitive pricing and budget-friendly solutions, the companies systematically extract additional fees through deceptive practices.<sup>[41]</sup>

## **## Financial incentives driving harmful practices**

Recent financial developments suggest these practices will continue rather than improve. In May 2024, the companies secured **\$525 million in new capital** from Carlyle Group and JPMorgan Chase, following a \$160 million raise in 2020.<sup>[42]</sup> This influx of private equity capital, managed by Virgo Investment Group (which describes itself as an "opportunistic investor" focused on "market dislocations"), creates pressure for returns that may perpetuate harmful billing practices.<sup>[43]</sup>

The business model appears specifically designed to maximize fee extraction. By requiring substantial upfront payments before service delivery and maintaining physical control of customers' belongings, the companies create leverage for demanding additional payments.<sup>[44]</sup> The franchise structure of Zippy Shell adds another layer of inconsistency, with different locations potentially employing varying degrees of these tactics.<sup>[45]</sup>

Industry data supports the systematic nature of these issues. With both companies maintaining 1.3-1.4 star ratings across multiple platforms and generating hundreds of complaints annually, the evidence points to deliberate business practices rather than occasional service failures.<sup>[46]</sup><sup>[47]</sup>

## **## Conclusion**

The documented evidence reveals systematic billing deception at both 1-800-PACK-RAT and Zippy Shell under the leadership of Mark Kuhns, Gareth Taylor, and Kevin Barbour. Employee testimony confirming management directives to hide charges,

combined with hundreds of customer complaints documenting specific billing abuses, provides substantial material relevant to legal proceedings. The recent \$1.6 million settlement for privacy violations demonstrates the companies' willingness to violate consumer protection laws, while the influx of private equity capital suggests these practices will continue. Despite public statements about customer service excellence, these executives oversee operations that federal investigators have identified as exhibiting fraud indicators common in the moving industry.

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