

Poll: Self-Storage Operators Want Disclaimers for Auction-Based Reality TV Shows

While reality television shows depicting live auctions at self-storage facilities are ratings winners with the public, the vast majority of storage operators would like to see programmers add disclaimers that educate consumers about the auction process.

In a survey conducted last month by the national Self Storage Association (SSA), 77 percent of respondents said they would like shows such as “Storage Wars” and “Auction Hunters” to carry a disclaimer that more accurately informs the public about the legal and revenue recovery process. More specifically, 60 percent would like to see a disclaimer clarifying that revenues recovered through auctions are typically less than the amounts owed by tenants in default.

Those numbers seem to reflect the opinions of the most vocal industry opposition to the way self-storage is portrayed on cable television. The most common criticisms from operators have been that the shows can mislead the public into believing no one knows what items are inside an abandoned storage unit and that storage facilities make more money by auctioning a unit’s contents than keeping tenants current on their payments.

Of course, criticism of the shows has not necessarily kept self-storage operators from watching. The survey indicated 46 percent of owners and managers like the auction shows, while 38 percent dislike them. The SSA did not indicate how many of the 400 storage operators contacted across the nation regularly watched any episodes.

The shows appear to be more popular among operators in the mid-Atlantic and southern states, with more than half of respondents in those regions liking the shows, while less than one-third of operators out West responded favorably.

As a whole, 50 percent of operators indicated that self-storage exposure through the auction shows has at least moderately increased the number of bidders who show up to their lien sales.

The survey had a margin of error of +/- 5 percent.