



EMPLOYMENT &
HUMAN SERVICES

MEMORANDUM

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To: All Staff, Code 2A

Date: August 3, 2021

From: Community Relations

Subject: Tips to Avoid Rental Scams

For your information and to pass along to community members, the Contra Costa District Attorney's Office has provided tips to help consumers avoid rental scams.

What is a rental scam?

Scammers will list properties for rent online (i.e., Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace) even though they do not own them or have authority to rent them out. The scammer will attempt to have a prospective renter transfer money via wire service, or will demand cash payment for the lease and/or deposit, by claiming they can rent it but are not available to show it now.

Different kinds of rental scams

- **Knockoff listings:** When searching for properties, be on the lookout for listings copied and pasted from a legitimate listing but then offered at a low price.
- **Illegal sublets:** A scammer has obtained access to a listed property, and begins to show the unit as if their own or with authority to rent out.
- **Ghost rentals:** Scammers will list properties that are not for rent or do not exist and try to lure a potential renter with a promise of low rent and great amenities. The goal is to get the victim's money before they find out.

Identifying scams

- Scammers will request a wire transfer for a first month's rent, security deposit, application fees or vacation rental fees if applicable as a wire transfer. A wire transfer is equivalent to handing over cash.
- The scammer will request funds prior to signing the lease or viewing the property with the excuse that the property is in high demand, adding an urgency to the transaction. The scammer will claim to have a list of other possible renters who are also interested in the property.
- Scammer will claim to be out of the country by alleging an agent or lawyer is working on their behalf.

Tips to avoid rental scams

- Verify who owns the unit or building. To ensure that the person renting the unit is the legitimate owner or property manager, do an online search or visit the [Contra Costa County Recorder's](#) office located at 555 Escobar St., Martinez CA 94553.

- Conduct an Internet search using a search engine such as Google or Bing by entering in the listed address, agent or alleged homeowner's name, email and phone number. Be cautious of images that may be generated from Multiple Listing Service (MLS). MLS is a service that realtors frequently use to list properties for prospective buyers. Scammers will crop and adjust these photos for their own use for fraudulent ads.
- Legitimate landlords will arrange a tour of the interior of the property without excuse or hesitation. Before any money is exchanged, the landlord will take in an application to do a background check.
- Landlords will usually accept a personal check, a cashier's check or money order for the first month's rent and security deposit.
- Never provide an advance payment. Money is usually not exchanged until a legitimate lease is signed. Do not agree to pay anything in cash or via wire transfer.
- Do not give personal information until you verify the leasing party.
- Ask detailed questions about the unit, application and move-in date/process. Scammers do not want to answer detailed questions because they are only after the initial deposit. In doing so, they will end communication, ignore the questions or their answers will contain strange grammar.
- If a deal seems too good to be true, it usually is.

Spanish translation:

[Consejos para evitar estafas de alquiler](#)

More Info:

[Contra Costa District Attorney website](#)