

Online Rental Housing Fraud

On October 21st, the Washoe County Sheriff's Department issued a press release regarding emerging online rental housing fraud in the Reno-Sparks area. Please read the press release below as well as the article we posted in our June 2010 Members Monthly. [Click here to read article](#)

**Sign up for
Google Alerts
for each of
your listings
to check for
potential
scams**

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Consumer Alert: Online Rental Ads May be Phony

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The Washoe County Sheriff's Office Detective Division would like to alert residents of an emerging online rental housing fraud in the Reno-Sparks area. Detectives have uncovered an on-line rental scam in Northwest Reno where criminals solicit renters on local websites such as Craigslist, Rentals.com and Postlets to obtain personal identifying information such as social security numbers, bank accounts, and credit information.



Amie Duncan
Executive Assistant

Scammers are taking legitimate listings for homes, complete with pictures, and repost it under a fictitious name, on Craigslist or other rental websites (without the sites consent or knowledge) under the housing rentals category. To lure the renters, the houses are almost always listed at below-market rental rates. The interested party will contact the "homeowner" via e-mail, who usually explains that he or she had to leave the U.S. quickly. Sheriff's Office Detective Sergeant Tom Green said that the most recent case included a man who claimed he recently transferred to London, UK. "Potential renters are then asked to fill out a credit application or in some cases wire money for two months rent" said Green, "they then use this information to commit identity fraud and or obtain money from their victims."

Cherie Williams at Reno/Sparks Association of Realtors and Shelley Specchio, CEO of the Northern Nevada Regional MLS both say that this is a common scam in their field. "Many of our Members (REALTORS®) have been affected nationwide" said Specchio. She encourages her members to sign up for Google Alerts for each of their listings to check for potential scams on a regular basis.

The following are some tips on ways to avoid being victimized:

- Only deal with landlords or renters who are local;
- Be suspicious if you're asked to only use a wire transfer service;
- Beware of e-mail correspondence from the "landlord" that's written in poor or broken English;
- Research the average rental rates in that area and be suspicious if the rate is significantly lower;
- Don't give out personal information, like social security, bank account, or credit card numbers.

The Sheriff's Office also encourages potential renters to check on-line at www.washoecounty.us under Property Information to check to see who the owner of record is. The Assessor's Office provides Real Property Assessment Data which includes the name of the owner(s). If you suspect a scam, have already been victimized, or know someone who has fallen victim to a scam, please report it to the Washoe County Sheriff's Office Detective Division at 775.328.3320.