

Consumer Alert

Office of Consumer Affairs



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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County of Summit Office of Consumer Affairs Warns of Internet Home Rental Scam

Are you looking for a house to rent? Scam artists may be looking for you too. Consumers who are searching for a rental property need to be aware of the latest con out to get your money.

Recently, a Summit County resident reported finding a classified listing for a rental property posted on the Internet. The consumer contacted the email address provided and was told that the "homeowner" was living out of the country and would be unable to show the house, but the potential renter could look through the windows of the home to check it out. The consumer received a rental application form by email and was informed that the monthly rent would be \$1,000.

For this potential renter, she did not fall victim to the scam. Before she filled out the application or sent money, she became suspicious of the low rent when she looked at the property and called the Office of Consumer Affairs to find out if this home rental listing was legitimate. In this case, it was a scam. How was it a scam? A local real estate company had posted a rental listing for this home on the Internet, but removed it because it was rented. A few days later, the con artist posted a fake rental advertisement using pictures and information from the legitimate listing, but providing their contact information in order to get money and personal information from consumers.

If you are searching for a rental property, remember to:

- o Ask questions. If they live out of the area, ask if they have a local realtor or property management company handling the rental so you can contact them directly.
- o For information or questions on landlord/tenant issues contact the Fair Housing Contact Service at 330-376-6191.
- o Know who you are dealing with. Confirm the landlord's physical address and phone number in case you have problems or questions. Effective September 28, 2006, House Bill 294 requires owners of residential rental property to register their rental(s) with the County Auditor where the property is located. You may check the Summit County Fiscal Office, Residential Rental Registry by calling 330-643-2546.
- o NEVER use email to send or receive personal or financial information. Never wire, ACH Debit or overnight money unless you are absolutely certain who you are dealing with.

"Before you make a payment or give out personal information, call the Office of Consumer Affairs to verify information on a business," said Cynthia Sich Director of the Office of Consumer Affairs.

For more information on this or other types of scams, please contact the County of Summit Office of Consumer Affairs at 330-643-2879, or visit our website at www.co.summit.oh.us/conaffairs.htm.