

Tips for avoiding Rental Property Scams

Prospective renters typically fall victim after responding to an online classified for a rental property. Here's how it works: When you send an email through the classified ad site inquiring about the home, a response comes from someone claiming to be the owner. The "owner" may claim he and his wife are currently on missionary work in a foreign country. They need someone to rent their home while they are away. The owner then asks you to send money to him in the foreign country via a wire service. The scammer gets the money, and you lose.

You should be skeptical of any solicitation where:

1. *The deal sounds too good to be true.* Scammers may lure victims by listing a rental for a very low price. Compare listings, and if the rental comes in suspiciously low, walk away.
2. The landlord is located elsewhere and prefers to communicate via e-mail. Look for common red flags like poor grammar and misspellings. Scammers might say they have just been relocated out of the country for a job or missionary work - don't believe it. Deal locally with people you can meet in person.
3. The landlord requires a substantial deposit before handing over the keys or even showing the home. Don't pay any money before inspecting the home, inside and out.
4. The landlord asks the renter to wire money through wire transfer services such as Western Union or MoneyGram. *Never wire money to secure a deal.* Money sent via wire transfer service is extremely difficult to retrieve, and once the scammers have picked it up, there is little chance of getting the money back.

Mississippi Attorney General's Office Consumer Protection Division 2013