Home Sellers And Renters Need To Know About Rental Fraud And How To Deal With It

August 6, 2020 - You may not be familiar with rental fraud but it can happen to anyone, and it's especially problematic for people who have their homes listed for sale. It's a simple crime to commit. And it's a difficult crime to prevent. Moreover, it can create real problems for homeowners.

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s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
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Typical rental fraud works this way. A crook will identify a home he doesn't own and place an ad for rent on a website such as Craigslist. Often, the rental amount will look like it is too good to be true€¦ because it is. When people start making inquiries about the property, they will be provided with an application to fill out. And once they submit the application, they will find that they get approved and they are then asked to wire their deposit and first month's rent.

Not only will victims lose the money they just wired, through the application process they have probably provided enough information to become victims of identity theft. That's because most rental applications are going to ask for all of your personal information. SSN, current address, driver's license numbers and even banking information can be part of the application. Because of this, anyone falling for a scam like this can be victimized for years to come.

But it isn't just those who apply for fraudulent rentals that are victimized. This type of fraud causes issues for the actual owners of the properties being rented. It is quite common for victims to show up at the door claiming that they rented a property. It's usually at that point that the crime is discovered. And often times, the people running these scams will rent the same property to multiple people. You can imagine what a nightmare that would be whether you are the owner or the applicant.

The problem is especially prevalent in homes that are legitimately advertised for sale or rent. That's because most listed properties include pictures. Anyone can copy those pictures and repost them, making their fraudulent listings look like the real thing.

Catching the criminals behind these crimes can be nearly impossible. That's because they can be anywhere around the globe. These transactions are handled predominantly online so there is no physical contact. And most communications are conducted via text message. Setting up a US phone number for texting is extremely simple and can be handled online. Once the criminals are exposed, they simply change their numbers and start all over.

If you are a renter, there are things you can do to protect yourself. First, if you find a rental listing that looks a little too

attractive, then you need to do some research. Check to see if there are other listings for the property elsewhere, like on Zillow or Realtor.com. If there are, then track down the agent on the listing and talk to him or her. You'll want to do that before you fill out an application or send any money.

And if you are a property owner with a home that is listed for sale, you may want to periodically do some internet searches to see if your property is listed for rent anywhere. If you find out that it is, then contact your agent and ask them to notify the websites where fraudulent listings appear, to contact the police, and to attempt to contact the criminals via email or phone and let them know that law enforcement has been notified. These actions should result in the fraudulent listings being taken down and can mitigate any damage that they may have caused.
by Jim Malmberg
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