Beware of Rental Scams

Some scammers start with real rental listings. They then remove the owner’s contact information, put in their own, and place the new listing on a different site — although they may continue to use the name of the actual owner. Some scams also happen on legitimate listings. The scammer will advertise amenities that don't actually exist and then try to collect higher rent before the applicant realizes they are missing. Once the lease is signed, it becomes more difficult for the renter to get out of the deal.

The "bait-and-switch," one of the most common scams, is when a different property is advertised than the one that is actually available. Another scam is the "hijacked ad," which can even happen on homes that are legitimately for sale. The scammer poses as a fake landlord, advertising the for-sale home, but changing the contact information. Another scam is listing a property that is already leased and then trying to collect application fees or security deposit. Their goal is to get your money before you find out the truth.

So how do you avoid a rental scam?

- **Don’t wire money or pay with a prepaid or gift card for a rental.** Once the scammer collects the money, it is almost impossible to get it back.

- **Don’t be rushed into a decision.** If you receive an email pressuring you to make a decision on the spot for a rental, ignore it and move on.

- **Get a copy of the contract before you send any deposit money.** Check that the address of the property really exists. If the property is located in a resort, call the front desk and confirm the location of the property and other details on the contract.

- **Before renting, call the management company.** Talk with the property manager for more information on the property and visit to take a tour the property if you are able to do so.

- **Do your research on the property ahead of time.** If the property has a listed Real Estate Agent, reach out to them for more information on the property and schedule a tour of the property.

If you think you might be the victim of a scam, please file a report online at [www.pwcgov.org/policereport](http://www.pwcgov.org/policereport) or call 703-792-6500.