



Consumer ALERT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 7, 2022

DRE WARNS CONSUMERS TO BEWARE OF I.D. THEFT SCAMMERS TRYING TO RENT HOUSING THEY DO NOT OWN OR LEGALLY CONTROL

Scam shows growth in unauthorized use of licensed real estate agent company names and information

SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Real Estate (DRE) is issuing a statewide Consumer Alert for anyone looking for rental housing, after seeing an increase in identity theft scams.

Over the past few weeks, DRE has received a number of complaints from licensees claiming that scammers are taking information from current “For Sale” listings and posting homes as “For Rent” on other websites. In some other cases, scammers have used homes that were for rent in recent months and made it look like they were back for rent.

The scammers then use the name of the licensee or company to get prospective renters to electronically transfer fees, deposits, and rent.

Similar scams in the past include using phony rental applications to get personal information, such as a social security number, driver’s license number, and bank account numbers, to steal the identities of the “renter” victims.

“While this is not a new type of scam, the ability to quickly make electronic transfers has unfortunately made it even easier and more profitable for scammers,” said Real Estate Commissioner Doug McCauley. “Consumers need to be vigilant, especially if they see a listing for a rental property that sounds too good to be true.”

Red Flags

- Unusually low rental price compared to other rentals in the area
- The purported landlord or property agent requests advance payment of deposits, rents and other fees electronically, without ever meeting the prospective renter in-person or allowing the prospective renter to tour the property

How Prospective Renters Can Protect Themselves

- Be wary and don’t fall for a deal that sounds too good to be true.

- Perform an online search of the property's address and check popular real estate websites like Redfin.com and Zillow.com to see if the property is actually listed for sale. If the property is for sale, those websites will include information on the real estate agent responsible for the listing. Contact that agent.
- Verify the identity of the supposed landlord, Property Manager, or Leasing Agent. If they do not live at the property, they must be licensed by DRE. Check the status of that license by their name, company name, or license number at <https://www2.dre.ca.gov/PublicASP/pplinfo.asp>.
- Do not rent a property without touring it in-person.
- Do not pay or transfer any money without reviewing and receiving copies of all rental documents.
- Use extreme caution if sharing your social security number or bank account numbers with others.

What to do If You've Been Scammed

- If a DRE-licensed person or an unlicensed person practicing real estate is involved, [file a complaint with DRE](#)
- If an attorney or unlicensed person practicing law is involved, contact the [California State Bar](#)
- File a complaint with the [California Attorney General](#)
- Contact your local district attorney, sheriff, or police
- Contact the [Federal Trade Commission](#)
- Contact the [Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#)
- Contact your local small claims court, where you may be able to resolve disputes quickly and inexpensively before a judge.

DRE licensees are encouraged to be aware if consumers contact them asking if a listing is actually for rent. The agent should try and get more information on what may be a fraudulent rental listing.

DRE licensees also are encouraged to regularly search the address of their listed properties on online classified advertising sites to see if they show up as a rental.

Learn more about renting a property on the [DRE website](#), and in the DRE publication, [California Tenants – A Guide to Residential Tenants' and Landlords' Rights and Responsibilities](#).

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