

Online Housing Scams



How can I protect myself?

With North Dakota's booming economy, affordable housing is in high demand. Scammers know that a good deal is hard to pass up. Here are some tips to help prevent you from becoming a victim of a housing scam.

How Scams Work

- Hijacked Ads
 - Some scammers hijack real ads by changing the contact information to their own, modifying it and placing it on another website.
- Phantom Rentals
 - These listings are for places that aren't for rent, or don't exist. They try to lure you in with low rent or great amenities.

Signs of a Scam

- They ask you to wire money via Western Union, MoneyPak, GreenDot, etc.
 - This is the surest sign of a scam. There is NEVER a good reason to wire money. This is true even if they send you a contract first. Wiring the money is the same as sending cash – once you send it, there is no way to get it back.
- They ask for a deposit or first month's rent before you've met, signed a lease, or looked at the property.
 - Don't put any money down on a property you aren't allowed to see
 - Do a search on the owner and listing
 - If you find the same ad listed under a different name, that's a clue it may be a scam.
- They say they're out of country
 - They have a plan to get the keys to you – it might involve a lawyer or "agent"
 - Some scammers create fake keys
 - Don't, under any circumstances, send money overseas.
 - If you can't meet in person, see the apartment/house, or sign a lease before you pay, keep looking.

If you find yourself the target of a rental scam, report it to your local police and to the Federal Trade Commission. Contact the website where the ad was posted as well.

For more information on rental scams or other topics please call the Bismarck Police Department Crime Prevention section at 223-1212.