

RENTAL SCAM AWARENESS

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If you're looking for an apartment or house rental, the last thing you want is to fall victim to a rental scam. Scam artists like to take advantage of prospective tenants because emotions involved in the apartment-hunting process can make people more vulnerable. For instance, if you're feeling excitement and enthusiasm about finding a new home, your eagerness might make you become more trusting. Scam artists also prey on apartment hunters who are in a time crunch and are trying to find a new place as soon as possible. Fortunately, there are ways apartment hunters can lower the likelihood of getting caught up in a rental scam.

What Is a Rental Scam?

Rental scams are a variation on a theme. The scammer tries to get money from a prospective tenant for an apartment that the scammer is in no legal position to rent. The apartment or house might be real (in which case, the scammer doesn't have the authority to lease it) or fictitious. The scammer could be a real landlord or, more likely, an impostor. Scammers typically try to get money from unsuspecting renters, and disappear. Once the victims realize they've been scammed, the scammer has usually vanished with their money.

Follow the General Rule

Don't let your guard down when looking for a rental. Just because you use a reputable rental search Web site doesn't mean you can't get scammed by unscrupulous landlords or people posing as landlords. If something feels wrong with a listing, the application process feels rushed, or the whole experience just seems too good to be true, it may be wise not to pursue it.

You're Asked to Send Money Without Having Met Anyone or Seen the Apartment

It's not common to pay a lot of money for something sight-unseen. So, if a landlord expects you to pay a lot before you sign a lease, it's a reason to be concerned. Don't rely on promises or photos (Use Google Images to check photos). Actually, visit any apartment you're considering renting. According to a warning on Craigslist, not following this one rule accounts for 99 percent of scam attempts.

Landlord Seems Too Eager to Lease the Apartment

Many landlords want to know your credit score, and they may also want more information about you, such as a criminal background check and employment verification. If a landlord doesn't seem interested in any form of tenant screening or appears too eager to negotiate the rent and other lease terms with you, it's suspicious.

Unusually High-Security Deposit or Too Many Upfront Fees

If the landlord wants a higher security deposit than what's required by law, or if upfront fees seem excessive to you, it could be a sign that the landlord wants to take your money and run.

Unwarranted Sales Pressure

If a landlord acts too pushy, it can be a red flag.

You're Told You Don't Need a Lawyer

It's true you don't need a lawyer to review your lease, and generally speaking, it's in a landlord's best interest for you to skip lawyer review and just take the rental. But when a landlord makes a point of saying that you don't need a lawyer, it is a red flag that the landlord is trying to rush you.

You're Told You Don't Need a Lease

It's true you don't need a lease to live in a rental. Although renting under a lease is the most typical situation, but a month-to-month rental agreement is fairly common. If a landlord tries to get money from you without considering that you might want a lease, think twice. It could be that the "landlord" doesn't have any lease to show you.

The Landlord Not Being Able to Meet You or Show the Property

The person behind a listing might say he's out of the country indefinitely or that he won't return until after you would need to agree to the rental and pay money.

What If You Get Scammed?

If you become the victim of a rental scam, call the police, contact the publisher of the ad, File a complaint with the FTC (call 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357) or <https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov/#crnt&panel1-1>), learn from the experience and share your story with others so they are aware.