

SCAM ALERT

Beware of Overpayment Scams Targeting Classified Advertisers

Grifters looking to make a quick buck have turned to classified ads to line their pockets. These "overpayment" scams have occurred nationwide and include newspaper and craigslist ads. The scammer poses as a genuine buyer and sends a check to the seller for the cost of the item plus an overpayment (e.g., \$300-\$500) to pay for moving truck or insurance expenses. The scammer will ask the seller to refund the excess amount, usually through an online bank transfer, preloaded money card, or wire transfer. The seller cashes the phony check and later discovers it has bounced-after they have lost the money given to the scammer.

Warning Signs: How to Recognize a Scam

- Distant person offers to send seller a cashier's check, business check or money order and then have them wire (e.g. Western Union) money: this is almost ALWAYS a scam-the cashier's check is FAKE.
- Someone sends seller a check for more than seller requested but asks seller to wire them back or refund the excess funds or send the excess to a shipper in a different state.
- Distant seller suggests use of an online escrow service: most online escrow sites are FRAUDULENT and operated by scammers.
- The potential buyer is willing to buy the item without having viewed it in person-even if the item is expensive such as a car.
- Scammer may pretend to be unable to speak by phone (scammers prefer to operate by text/email).
- An overseas "buyer" is interested in purchasing the item despite being a commonly available item in that country (couch, car). In some cases, the shipping costs are higher than the item itself.
- Vague initial inquiry, e.g. asking about "the item." Poor grammar/spelling.
- Inability or refusal to meet face-to-face to complete the transaction.
- You receive an email from the scammer claiming that they have made payment but the amount is being held until you have forwarded on the extra amount.

Prevention: How to Protect Yourself

- Do not provide payment to anyone you have not met in person-deal locally and face-to-face. Follow this one rule and avoid 99% of scam attempts.
- Never wire funds to anyone you deal with on these sites. Use secure payment methods you are familiar with only.
- Never give out financial information, such as financial account numbers, social security numbers, PayPal information.
- Avoid any transaction that involves an overpayment. If you are sent a check in excess, send it back and ask for one with correct amount. If you receive too much money from a credit card payment only agree to refund it back onto the card.
- If you receive a receipt for payment that is being held, check with the company - it is rare for a financial service to withhold payments until another action is carried out.
- Do not send the items to the buyer until their payment has cleared in your bank account.

Following these measures will help protect you against predatory behavior that unfortunately is part of the internet world. The Florida Attorney General's Office in Tallahassee maintains an online link for complaints about possible fraud. You can report suspected fraud at myfloridalegal.com/contact.nsf/contact or call the fraud hotline at 1-866-966-7226.