



ADVERTISING ALERT

The FBI has issued a consumer alert affecting real estate listings in a rental housing scam. Such a scam was recently identified in Roanoke when an elderly couple drove from Greensboro to check out a purported rental, which was actually a listed property.

Criminals are searching legitimate websites that list homes for sale. They take the photos and information in those ads and post it, with their own email address, in an ad on craigslist under the housing rentals category. The houses are almost always listed with below market rental rates. *NOTE: craigslist is a legitimate website which facilitates many legitimate transactions.*

Potential renters may be asked to send a deposit out of state and/or fill out credit applications asking for personal information like credit history, work history and social security numbers. Criminals can use this information to commit identity fraud and/or steal money from their victims.

What should REALTORS do?

- Consider signing up for Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts) for each of your listings in order to get an email anytime that address is posted on a website. This will also alert you should your seller post his home on the Internet, without your knowledge.
- If you learn that one of your listings is part of an online scam – contact the website owner **immediately** to demand it be taken down. And document your efforts! Keep a log of the paper trail, emails and phone calls that reflect your proactive attempts to get this situation resolved. (You may want to make a copy of the bogus online ad.)
 - If your listing is involved in a scam on craigslist – email abuse@craigslist.org. Be sure to include the URL or 10-digit post ID number in your message.
- If one of your listings is part of an online scam – notify other authorities:
 - Federal Trade Commission www.FTCComplaintAssistant.gov
 - Internet Crime Complaint Center www.ic3.gov/complaint
The Internet Crime Complaint Center is co-sponsored by the FBI and the National White Collar Crime Center. Complaints filed via this website are processed and may be referred to federal, state, local or international law enforcement agencies.
- Report any unauthorized entry to the local police.
- Educate your buyers and sellers as to the possibility of online scams. craigslist posts the following helpful tips:
 - Deal locally with folks you can meet in person. Follow this one simple rule and avoid 99% of the scam attempts on craigslist.
 - Never wire funds.
 - Fake cashier checks and money orders are common.
 - Never give out financial information.