



United States Army

Criminal Investigation Command

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CID Cybercrime Unit Warns Rental Scams on the Rise

QUANTICO, Va. (August 3, 2020) – Housing rental scams are on the rise worldwide. The U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, commonly known as CID, reminds the Army community to be cautious when responding to any advertisement regarding home or apartment rentals.

According to Edward Labarge, director of CID’s Major Cybercrime Unit, scammers use a variety of tactics to steal people’s money before the victim determines the listing is fake.

“A typical rental scam works by a property being listed at a low price, usually below market rate, to get the attention of potential renters,” said Labarge. “Then the scammers will pressure the renters to pay a deposit and the first and last month’s rent to secure the rental.”

Army CID reports there are currently millions of fake listings for apartments, duplexes, and houses listed on classified ads and reputable rental sites worldwide. The scam is accomplished when rentals are advertised, but they do not actually exist, are no longer available, or are up for sale.

“Rental scams will be more prevalent in larger metro areas where there are a large number of real estate rentals on the market,” said Labarge. “This makes it easy for these types of scams to go unnoticed due to the large volume of rentals.”

Although rental scams may be targeted toward anyone seeking a rental property, military members may be more prone to falling victim due to frequent Permanent Change of Station moves.

Labarge also said areas surrounding military installations are targeted due to competitive rental markets and service members having unique housing situations where they may not be available to view a property in person prior to arriving in the area.

Fake listings often lure victims in by offering military discounts, low rent, good neighborhoods, and great amenities.

“If a house or apartment is being listed well below market norms, there is a reason,” said Labarge. “If it’s too good to be true, it usually is. Also, a good telltale sign that the listing is a scam is that the landlords won’t want to meet you in person or there is no screening process. Every landlord will want to make sure they meet you in person, no matter how brief since they are making a major decision to trust that you’ll follow the rules of the lease.”

CID officials remind the Army community, if you feel you are a victim of a rental scam, contact your local CID office or law enforcement agency as well as the Federal Trade Commission.

Known types of rental scams:

Hijacked Ads

Scammers use real rental ads and photos from legitimate postings to create their own fake ads. Scammers will often use the same name as the legitimate posting and change the email address, or other contact information, to their own.

Phantom Rentals

Scammers make fake listings using photos from properties that are not for rent, for sale, or do not exist.

Watch for Warning Signs:

- They want you to sign or send money before you see the property.
- They want the security deposit or first month’s rent before you sign the lease.
- They ask you to wire or send money through a payment app.
- They say they are out of town or out of the country.
- They are ready to make a deal with no background information.

Protect yourself from becoming a victim of a rental scam:

- Do not rely solely on email to contact the owner and be wary of foreign telephone numbers.
- Do online research of the rental company, property address, and the owner.
- Conduct a reverse image search of the photos to see where else the images are being used.
- Ask for additional photos. The actual owner or property manager should be able to provide additional photos.
- Compare rent amount to other rentals in the area.
- Take a tour, or have someone you know in the area tour for you, in person or by video.
- Call the company to verify before signing a lease agreement.
- Never pay a security deposit, first month’s rent, or application fee with cash, wire transfers, gift cards, prepaid cards, or payment apps because once you send it, there is no way to get your money back.

- Obtain and review a copy of any contract prior to sending any money or providing any personal information.
- Do not make rush decisions. Scammers will often pressure unsuspecting victims to complete the deal quickly due to increased interest in the property, creating a false sense of urgency.

In addition, the Criminal Investigation Command's Major Cybercrime Unit continues to warn the Army community of ongoing Coronavirus-themed phishing attacks impersonating organizations with the end goal of stealing information and delivering malware.

Labarge said the Major Cybercrime Unit continues to "aggressively pursue cybercriminals both domestic and abroad who target our Soldier's and their families in their online campaigns."

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For more information about computer security, other computer-related scams, and to review previous cybercrime alert notices and cyber-crime prevention flyers visit the Army CID MCU website at <https://www.cid.army.mil/mcu-advisories.html>. To report a crime to Army CID, visit www.cid.army.mil