

Be aware of possible rental scams

 By [Adrian Goslett](#)

10 Mar 2017

While the internet is an extremely useful tool, it has also made it easier for criminals to prey on prospective tenants – with the number of incidences on the increase. Unfortunately, there is a criminal element who use the internet to scam potential tenants out of their hard-earned money.



©scyth5 – [123RF.com](#)

Emotionally driven, enthusiastic tenants who are excited about the prospect of finding the ideal rental property are often more susceptible to fraudulent activity. Time is also a factor. Tenants are often eager to find the right home within a limited time frame, which can make them vulnerable targets for criminals. Tenants move for various reasons, such as job opportunities or possibly personal issues, which could make them more desperate to find a place to stay and not be as cautious in their approach.

How do rental scams work?

A scammer will attempt to get money from a potential tenant for a rental property that they are not in a legal position to offer for rental. The fraudster will place an advertisement for a property, usually offering a great deal to lure in a victim. Often the advertisement will include photos of the property, and in some cases, the scammer will include a copy of a fake contract which is ready to be signed. The rental property could either be real or fictitious, with the scammer possibly a landlord or impersonating the landlord or rental agent. The scammer will request that a deposit and possibly the first month's rent be deposited into their account to secure the property. Once the unsuspecting tenant has transferred the agreed upon amount - the scammer disappears.

There are ways for vigilant tenants to lower their chances of becoming rental scam victims. Here are a few tips:

Even if the property is listed on a reputable website, it could still be a rental scam, so keep your guard up at all times. Crafty rental scammers are resourceful and often manage to get their listings onto search portals. Also trust your gut. If at any stage of the process you feel there is something wrong or the whole thing is rushed with unwarranted pressure, you feel information is being withheld or it all seems too good to be true – walk away.

Tenants should contact the numbers given by the landlord or rental agent to ensure that the office exists and is part of the brand they say they are representing. A reputable agency will be able to provide the tenant with all the information they require about the rental agent and their rental listings.

Red flags to watch out for:

- Don't transfer money without meeting the landlord or rental and seeing the actual property. It is best to see the property and inspect it before any money changes hands – know what you are paying for. A red flag should be raised if the landlord expects payment purely based on website images alone.
- Landlords and rental agents will have a vetting process, which will include a credit check, before they select a tenant. Beware of landlords or rental agents who are willing to sign contracts without following the correct protocols.
- Be wary of landlords or rental agents who request excessive deposit amounts or too many months upfront or are never able to meet and show you the property in person.
- A lease agreement is an essential contract that protects both parties, so don't trust a landlord who says there is no need for one. A landlord who doesn't want to enter into a lease agreement may not have one to offer in the first place.
- Before signing a lease agreement, have legal representation review the contract.

Unfortunately, there is no foolproof way to avoid a rental scam completely. However, potential tenants will be far more protected if they pay attention to the warning signs. It is vital for tenants to deal with rental agents from a reputable agency that they know and trust.

ABOUT ADRIAN GOSLETT

Adrian Goslett is CEO and regional director of RE/MAX Southern Africa. He joined RE/MAX Southern Africa in 2005 as a franchise development consultant, supporting various regions and offices. Throughout his career at RE/MAX he has held various positions. In 2010, after successfully leading 160 offices and over 1500 agents in six countries through the worst years real estate has ever seen in South Africa in 30 years, Goslett was appointed as CEO of RE/MAX Southern Africa.
[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>