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MEDIA ALERT

Consumer Protection warns of fake rental scheme targeting real estate ads

"Division reminds public that internet scams continue to target consumers through classified ads"

(For immediate release...)

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah - Francine A. Giani, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Commerce, announced today that both the Utah Division of Consumer Protection and Division of Real Estate have received reports from real estate professionals regarding pirated listing information used by scammers to create fake rental property listings on popular online classified websites. The fake rental ads advertised the real estate as available for rent and asked interested renters to wire money through a transfer service to obtain a key to the property. The Division of Consumer Protection has found that in most cases, the wired funds are not recoverable as the fraudster is located out of the country and the consumer doesn't discover the fraud until they show up at the address and find out it is not a legitimate rental property.

"Young people seeking rental properties need to be especially careful when searching housing ads online. Many have grown up with the internet and feel comfortable doing business without face-to-face interaction which can make them more vulnerable to these types of online scams," warned Francine A. Giani.

The Division of Consumer Protection and Division of Real Estate have received complaints from real estate sales agents, potential renters and property managers about this scam taking place on classified websites in Utah. Some of the common elements found in these fake rental ads are:

- The language in the online classified listing is very poor, as if somebody used a translation program to generate the language on the ad;
- The property cannot be inspected or shown in person because the "landlord" in charge of renting the property is either located in another state, or claims they are in Africa for work or serving a mission;
- The telephone numbers listed in the ads or in the follow up emails are for out of state numbers, or are international numbers; and,

- The names used in the ads have used prior property owners as the contact person.
- The person claiming to have authority to rent the property requests a deposit via wire transfer.

“Consumers should carefully consider any rental property situation before handing over information or money, whether as a landlord or as a renter,” said Deanna Devey, communications director for the Utah Association of Realtors. “Be on your guard for situations that seem too good to be true like a low deposit or rent as well as for situations where a landlord wants money wired without showing you the house. We recommend using a REALTOR® who has experience in rental properties to help you vet potential renters or find units that are legitimately for rent.”

The Division of Consumer Protection recommends that consumers not send any money through a wire transfer service unless the recipient is a trusted and known source. Also, the public is reminded to never give out personal account information, SSN numbers or other identifying information to strangers.

For more information log on to: www.consumerprotection.utah.gov

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