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BBB study shows rental fraud is pervasive among home, vacation property listings

Burnsville, MN – Dec. 10, 2019 – The place seems like a dream come true: the right space, the right location, the right price. But is it really for rent? Or will the renter arrive to find their money gone with nowhere to stay?

An in-depth investigative study by Better Business Bureau (BBB) finds that fraud is widespread in the online rental home and vacation rental market, with 43% of online shoppers encountering completely fake listings and more than 5 million consumers losing money to such scams.

The investigative study – **Is That Rental Listing Real? A BBB Study of Rental Scams Involving Apartments, Houses and Vacation Properties** – notes that 85% of consumers encountering fake rental listings do not fall for them. However, these figures suggest that the volume of rental scams lurking on the internet is staggering. Read the full study [here](#).

According to the study, rental scams can take several forms, but perhaps most commonly, fraudsters simply copy the photo and description of a property, post it online with their own contact information and try to get a deposit and first month's rent from the victim. The fraudster may communicate only by email or text message and may claim to be out of the country and unavailable to show the property. Once the victim sends money, the fraudster disappears.

"Never rush into paying for upfront rental fees before at least viewing the property in person and verifying the details of the listing," CEO Susan Adams Loyd said. "It might be tempting, but if they want you to pay without seeing it, it just may be a scam."

[BBB Scam Tracker](#) has received more than 1,300 reports of rental fraud from 2016 to 2019, while the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) reports more than \$37 million in losses associated with complaints that mention the word "rent" over just a 10-month time frame this year.

In addition to warning consumers of red flags that may signal rental scams, the report recommends to property owners:

- Rental unit owners should watermark photos used for rental postings, which will make it more difficult for scammers to copy photos of other properties posted online.
- Website platforms that list houses, apartments and vacation properties should make extra effort to screen for bogus listings, and they should explore ways to allow consumers to easily report scam listings.

What to do if you are the victim of a rental scam:

- File a report with local police.
- Go to BBB.org to view a business' BBB Business Profile, including complaints and reviews, or to file a complaint or report a scam on [Scam Tracker](#).
- Contact the Federal Trade Commission at ftc.gov/complaint or by calling 877-FTC-HELP.
- File a complaint with the Internet Crime Complaint Center.

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The mission of BBB is to promote, through self-regulation, the highest standards of business ethics and conduct, and to instill public confidence in responsible businesses through programs of education and action that inform, protect and assist the public.

Contact the BBB at bbb.org or 651-699-1111, toll-free at 1-800-646-6222.