



Rental Scam Tips for Property Owners and Renters

Rental scams happen when either a property owner or potential tenant misrepresents themselves. Rental scams also misrepresent the terms and availability of a rental property. Fake ads and fake responses to rental ads can hurt both tenants and property owners.

Tips for Rental Property Owners

There are steps you can take as a landlord to help identify “red flags.” If you feel that you’re the [victim of a renter’s scam](#) involving the internet, report the incident to the Richmond Police Department and the [Federal Trade Commission](#). The following tips could also help you protect yourself from scams targeting property owners:

DO:

- Consider using a broker/management service to conduct rental screenings and deal directly with the tenants.
- Run a credit check on potential tenants. Be cautious accepting a pre-printed credit report provided by the applicant, as these can be easily counterfeited.
 - [Tenant background check, also known as a consumer report.](#)
- Verify the identity of the individual you are renting to.
- Request each renter’s personal references and follow up with those individuals.
- Verify your tenant’s employment: ask for copies of pay stubs, and contact their employer to confirm their employment and salary as stated.
- Be wary of unexplained urgencies to rent the property.

DO NOT:

- Accept overpayment for rental properties.
- If you receive a check that’s for more than the specified amount, return it. Do not deposit it.
- Rent or sell to a would-be tenant or buyer sight unseen.
- Accept a cashier’s check from your potential tenant if he or she is out of the country.

Tips for Prospective Renters

If you’re searching for rental properties, it’s important to learn about rental scams. Report a rental scam to the Richmond Police Department and the Department of Consumer Affairs. The following tips could help you protect your money and time:

DO:

- Meet the landlord in person: Though some scammers will readily meet tenants in person, many, especially those operating from overseas, will not. A personal meeting with the landlord will allow you to screen out scams.
- Learn the basics of [how rental listing scams work.](#)



DO (continued from first page):

- Get the terms of your rental in writing, including fees, rent, and maintenance.
- Get a copy of the lease, signed by both you and the property owner/manager.
- Do a search on the owner, real estate management company, and listing. If you find the same ad listed under a different name, that's a clue it might be a scam.
- Be wary of a landlord who asks you to wire funds or pay in cash: check and cashier checks are returned to your bank with account information of the person who cashed it.
- Never rent "sight-unseen": Viewing an apartment/home helps prevent fraud and also ensures that the tenant is aware of the condition of the unit.
- Be aware of a high-pressure tactics: Landlords who are not interested in a potential tenant's background don't ask for a credit check, require upfront payments before any lease is signed or someone offering sublease without proper authority could be signs of a scam.
- Contact the Richmond Rent Program to verify the owner of the rental unit.

DO NOT:

- Wire money as a deposit or payment for the first and last month's rent. Wiring money is the same as giving cash; you can't get a refund, even if you find out the offer was a fraud.
- Pay a security deposit, fee, or first month's rent before you've signed a lease.
- Rent a property that you are unable to see before signing the agreement.
- Send money for a rental overseas.
- Give your personal information or Social Security number to a property owner without verifying their identity.

Resources:

1. [Richmond Rent Program](#)
Phone: (510) 234-RENT (7368)
Email: rent@ci.richmond.ca.us
Address: 440 Civic Center Plaza, Suite 200, Richmond, CA 94804
2. [Richmond Police Department](#)
Phone (Non-Emergency): 510-233-1214
Address: 1701 Regatta Blvd, Richmond, CA 94804
3. [Housing Scams](#), USA.Gov, *Tips Property Owners and Renters*. September 8, 2020.
4. [Federal Trade Commission](#), FTC.gov, *FTC Complaint Assistant*. October 8, 2020.
5. [California Department of Consumer Affairs](#),
Phone: (800) 952-5210
Email: DCA@dca.ca.gov