

Strathcona County RCMP warn residents of the vacation rental scam

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Strathcona County RCMP is currently investigating a scam involving a vacation rental posted on the buy and sell site known as Kijiji.

This scam begins with a person searching for a rental property (an apartment or home) in a desired destination. Once the potential victim contacts the "renter" they will be asked to provide a "deposit" on the rental. Typically, it is requested that the deposit be sent via wire transfer. It is usually once the potential victim arrives at the property that they realize it was all a scam - the rental either doesn't exist, the condition has been misrepresented, or it was never available for rent.

This happened to a local group of friends looking to spend a few days in Banff earlier this month. The group located a vacation rental house on Kijiji and after conversing with who they believed to be the homeowner a deposit was sent through e-transfer. When they arrived at the vacation rental the actual owners were present and it was determined they had been scammed.

Kijiji can be very useful for buying and selling rental properties many being legitimate. If you are going to rent a vacation home on Kijiji or know someone who might, here are a few tips to safeguard your investment;

- If it looks too good to be true - it probably is. Look up the reasonable price range for this type of property in the same area. If the price is too good to be true, be extra cautious.
- Look up the property address and conduct a 'Street View' to ensure that the property exists and appears the same as in the images.
- Ask for additional images. The true owner of this property will be able to provide you with images that are not necessarily included in the ad. Alternatively, ask the owner to contact you via video-conferencing (using Skype, Facetime, etc). This way you will be able to view the property and verify ownership.
- Fraudulent users often prefer to use cash-transfers such as Money Gram or Western Union. We recommend that you use VISA, Master Card or American Express as they will help recover any payments in the case of loss.

If you have information about this, or any other crime(s), and you want to remain anonymous, you can contact Crime Stoppers by phone at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS), by internet at www.tipsubmit.com, or by SMS (check your local Crime Stoppers [www.crimestoppers.ab.ca] for instructions on how to do it.) You do not have to reveal your identity to Crime Stoppers, and if you provide information to Crime Stoppers that leads to an arrest(s), the recovery of stolen property, and/or a seizure of illicit drugs, you may be eligible for a cash reward.