



FAKE RENTAL OR SHARE ACCOMMODATION SCAMS



The Office of Regulatory Services is warning interstate and international university and tertiary college students to be wary of cheap rental properties being advertised on Canberra ACT rental and share accommodation websites, as the shortage of rental accommodation in Canberra has led scammers to post fake listings on these websites.

The photos and addresses of these rental and share accommodation properties may look genuine, but photos and property details are easily copied from reputable internet sites.

In 2009 a university student lost \$1,600 in an on-line rental scam after a scammer, who claimed to be based in England, used photos of a Civic property and a fake contract to cheat the 19 year old student out of the money.

The tell-tale signs of on-line rental scams

- The advertised low rent is just too good to be true, and significantly cheaper than other similar properties in the same area.
- The landlord claims that they cannot show the property to prospective tenants, as they live overseas or are travelling overseas.
- The photos and descriptions of advertised apartments are inconsistent and do not match the properties described on the apartment block's own website.
- The tenancy agreement provided by the prospective landlord or the prospective landlord's 'lawyer' is not the standard residential tenancy agreement prescribed at Schedule 1 of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*. A standard residential tenancy agreement can be viewed at:
<http://www.tenantsact.org.au/Advice/Residential%20Tenancy%20Agree%2009.pdf>
- The prospective landlord requires upfront fees - to cover the bond and rent in advance - to be sent by money transfer and promises to send the keys by courier or express post.

Protect yourself from on-line rental scams

- If you are searching for a suitable rental or share property in Canberra, while still based interstate or overseas, ask someone you trust such as your university or college accommodation service for advice.
- Independently check on the internet that the person, company or real estate agency offering the rental or share accommodation is legitimate.
- Don't provide your bank account details, ID, a copy of your passport, date of birth or address to someone you don't know. Scammers also steal identities.
- Avoid paying upfront fees by money transfer e. g. Western Union. It is difficult, if not impossible, to recover money sent by wire transfer by the time the fraud is discovered.
- Make sure that you inspect the property before you enter into any agreement. If the prospective landlord makes excuses about why you can't inspect the property, then the so-called landlord might not be the property's legal owner.

Further information about rental scams can be found on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commissions' SCAMwatch website (www.scamwatch.gov.au):
<http://www.scamwatch.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/741233> Additional information can also be obtained by contacting the Office of Regulatory Services at ors@act.gov.au