

Opinion: Watch out for scams involving foreclosed houses

To the community,

We have encountered a new scam up here, at least new to us, that is probably a byproduct of the foreclosure crises.

Here is how it goes: bad guy/gal(s) find unoccupied home that is in foreclosure. They list the home for rent on a place like Craig's List. If they need to show the home, they break in and boldly do so, sometimes removing notices and real estate signs to obscure that the property is in distress or under the control of another entity. They accept money for first/last/deposit, etc., and then disappear.

The poor would-be tenant later finds out that his lease/tenancy is a farce.

Thanks to some nice work by El Dorado County sheriff's deputies, we have all three suspects identified in the one we just saw up here, which cost our victim more than \$4,000, as to which we will of course seek a restitution order.

This one might be harder than some to detect/defeat. Probably be best to be suspicious of any claimed property manager who does not have an established office, business cards, etc.

A call to California Department of Real Estate or a check with their Internet site can verify whether the person has a license, assuming you really have their true name. If dealing with a claimed owner unfamiliar to the prospective tenant, probably no harm in writing down license plates, asking for ID and verifying ownership with county records.

Back when not too many homes foreclosed and those that did tended to move fairly quickly to new occupants, this probably

would not have been nearly as easy to pull off as it apparently is now. Now, with some foreclosed homes sitting empty for months at a time, combined with an over-heated rental market (in part caused by persons dispossessed from their homes), there appears to be a window of opportunity for these crooks.

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