

Vacation rental scam warning in S. Lake Tahoe

South Lake Tahoe Police Department is warning potential vacation home renters of an ongoing scam on Craigslist.

These listings may include pictures and a lengthy description of a real house. Unsuspecting vacationers are paying in advance, usually by check or Western Union wire. The supposed landlord takes receipt of the money and when the victim shows up to the vacation rental, they find that the home is occupied by a permanent resident or that there are other renters in the home.

Other techniques being used are asking unsuspecting renters to deposit money directly into a bank account and then that bank account is closed. People are also being asked to buy gift cards and provide the card numbers to the scammers.

SLTPD offers the following tips:

- Use a credit card: Never use bank wires, certified checks, western union, or any other service where the money is gone forever immediately after you send it. The credit card company has already performed basic background checks on the company charging your card.
- Obtain full contact info and verify: Obtain full contact information for the person you are dealing with (name/address/phone number/email/etc.) and verify that information (by using Google search, etc). Any real business should be easy to verify, as they will have a full website, be easy to contact, etc. However, if dealing with a person, ask for references, especially full work contact info, and verify that contact info.
- Your phone calls are answered: If they always have to call you back (when you call, you always have to leave a

message to call you back), then avoid. When they call, ask for a phone number where you can immediately call them back. If they don't pick up the phone, watch out. Be aware that many scammers use message services (no one answers; you always need to leave a message). Also, Google any phone numbers. You should find your contact person associated with that number. If not, that may indicate the phone number is brand new.

If you are a victim of a vacation rental scam, contact the South Lake Tahoe Police Department at 530.542.6100.