



RIVERSIDE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
**NEWS RELEASE**  
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## **DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE WARNS OF RENTAL LISTING SCAMS**

Hundreds of thousands of concertgoers travel to eastern Riverside County each April to attend the Coachella and Stagecoach music festivals. Residents of that area can rent their homes for significantly more than at any other time of the year due to the high demand for lodging during festival time.

Many homeowners utilize online rental listing services to list their home for rent. These services do not always verify that the person making the listing is actually authorized to rent the home, thus creating an opportunity for scam artists to step in and prey on unsuspecting victims.

While there tend to be increases in these scams around festival time, the Riverside County District Attorney's Office wants to warn potential renters that they can happen anytime of the year.

The DA's Office is currently prosecuting at least three separate cases involving false or fraudulent real estate rental listings in the Coachella Valley. These scams appear to correspond with the time periods of the Coachella and Stagecoach music festivals and involve combined losses exceeding \$220,000 to nearly 80 victims. In each of the cases filed by the DA's Office, would-be renters identified homes for rent on Internet rental listing services. They communicated with someone claiming to be the owner or the owner's agent and were sent rental contracts and information for accessing the house. Believing the rental to be legitimate, the victim would send a deposit to reserve the rental typically either by check or wire transfer. Unsuspecting victims traveled to Riverside County, some from as far away as the East Coast or Canada, only to find that the house they thought they rented was not actually for rent and the money they provided as a deposit was gone.

This scam is difficult to detect because of the ease of listing a home for rent online. However, the DA's Office offers the following tips to help prevent this type of fraud:

- Don't pay in cash or via a wire transfer. Checks and credit cards may offer some sort of protection in the event of fraud.
- Whenever possible, don't send payment through the mail. Arrange to meet with the owner or agent at the property. If the "owner" is out of town or out of state, you may want to pass and look for a locally owned residence.
- If possible, inspect the property before renting. Obtain identification from whoever claims to be renting out the property.
- Before paying any money, call a local title company or a local real estate office and ask them for a property profile of the address. Verify the name of the owner. Look online for rental scams with that address or the name of the owner.
- Be suspicious of high security deposits. The more demanded upfront, the higher likelihood that it is a scam.

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- Use websites that have visible customer feedback, ratings on landlords, and a better reputation for secured transactions.
- If the home is being advertised by someone claiming to be a real estate agent then you can go to the California Bureau of Real Estate website (<http://www.dre.ca.gov/>) and verify the license.
- If the listing is being advertised by a property management company, then those companies are also owned by licensed real estate brokers. Their licenses may also be verified with the Bureau of Real Estate.
- If owners of homes are advertising online, they may also be advertising in the local papers. Check to make sure the contact info is the same for both listings.
- The best practice is to work with a local real estate agent for rentals and sales. If the agent has not done their due diligence with the tenant, and you lose money as a result –you can contact the Bureau of Real Estate and seek restitution through them.

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