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# Housing Horrors, Part 1

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In this tight economy, rentals across Vermont are in even more demand than usual with the vacancy rate at less than 1 percent-- and apartment scams on the internet seem to be taking hold.

"A month ago, I was still looking and I found a three-bedroom house, \$700," Dennise Demers said, "and it just seemed too good to be true. It was, it was some sort of scam that the guys said it was from Nigeria, and was asking me for more information, and asking for first month's rent without answering my questions, not having me look at the place."

Experts say there are several types of Craigslist scams out there: Scammers advertise inexpensive, but nonexistent places for rent and get people to send a deposit sight unseen. Another type of scam involves a renter pretending to be an owner.

"She posted on Craigslist and showed it as if she were the landlord," said Pam Favreau, a tenant advocate. "Took a prospective tenant's money and disappeared."

Others misrepresent the rental unit all together.

"The other thing we've seen most commonly, a lot more often, is an apartment not being what it was represented to be," Favreau said. "Not being in good repair, not being the same size that it was listed as being."

Craigslist has become the place to find apartments, especially in Burlington. With the click of a mouse you can find information and photos about the place you want to rent. But with every good deal, you have to do your homework.

Tim Rice owns Rental Solutions, a company that helps homeowners find renters for their properties.

"There's been some avenues that as they say scam artists that have been out there that doesn't do well for the rental real estate market. I think the key is obviously common sense; hopefully dealing with someone locally," Rice said.

He says there are sure-fire ways to protect yourself against a scam.

"If things sound a little fishy, they may be. And as the old adage says, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is," Rice warned.

If you are caught in a Craigslist scam, there are ways to help protect yourself.

"If the problem is that it's not in good repair, Vermont does have great rental housing health code laws. And so there's a standard setup by code within the state and a lot of municipalities," Favreau said.

Experts suggest doing some research to find information on the property you are interested in.

"You can actually call the city's code enforcement office, find out who the apartments registered to, who is registered as a property manager, and even the condition the unit is in," Favreau said.

[You can obtain a copy of the informational handbook for tenants at the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity's website.](#)

Our rental experts have a few more tips on how to successfully find an apartment in Vermont:

- If you are house hunting from afar, ask someone in your destination town to go look at the place for you. Real landlords have keys so prospective renters can get inside and check the place out.
- Scammers will ask you to wire your security deposit, and first and last month's rent. If you can't see the apartment, meet the person, or sign a lease before paying-- experts say, run, don't walk away from the deal.
- If the landlord claims to be out of the country, the scammers may very well be in another country since the internet has made it possible for people all over the globe to scam renters.
- If you suspect a rental scam, you are urged to report the incident to local law enforcement and the Federal Trade Commission at [www.ftc.gov/complaint](http://www.ftc.gov/complaint) -- Craigslist also urges you to report scams directly to them so they can also investigate.

[Melinda Davenport](#) - WCAX News