

FRAUDULENT INTERNET AUTOMOBILE SALES

As a part of National Consumer Protection Week, Attorney General George Jepsen is warning consumers about a common scam involving the fraudulent sale of automobiles over the Internet.

The scam begins when a consumer answers an online ad for the purchase of an automobile. To carry out this scam, the seller will convince the consumer to wire the sales proceeds through a “protection plan” controlled by Google. The consumer will be told that, through the use of this plan, the consumer’s money will be held in escrow and only released to the seller once the consumer indicates he or she is satisfied with the condition of the automobile.

In reality, Google is in no way involved with the transaction and the “protection plan” does not actually exist. The seller will employ fake or so-called “spoofed” invoices designed to look like they come from Google (or another well-known Internet company). The seller will also sometimes utilize phony e-mail communications designed to look like they come from the company. After the consumer has wired the funds for purchase, he or she discovers that there was no car for sale, that there was no “protection plan,” that his or her funds have been stolen, and that the “seller” was actually a scam artist. The Attorney General’s Office has received a complaint from a consumer who lost more than \$70,000 in one of these scams.

Any consumer who engages in a purchase transaction for an automobile (or other large-ticket item) over the Internet should proceed with caution and be mindful of the following:

- In general, if a deal looks too good to be true, it probably is.
- Be wary of any transaction where the seller claims that your wire transfer will be made to or facilitated by any well-known Internet company. Before agreeing to purchase anything through an Internet company, no matter the payment method, visit that company's website and thoroughly educate yourself about the payment methods accepted and the buyer protections afforded by such company.
- In general, be wary of any transaction where the seller requests or requires payment by wire transfer through Western Union, MoneyGram, any other similar service, or from your private bank account to an Internet company or otherwise. Remember that once money is wired you may not be able to get it back.
- Be wary of any transaction where the price of the automobile is significantly lower than what you see it listed for elsewhere or where the seller tells you that he or she needs money and wants to sell the automobile quickly.
- Be wary of any transaction in which the seller refuses to allow you to inspect the automobile prior to purchase (or provides excuses as to why an inspection would be impossible, difficult or inconvenient).

- Remember that Internet fraudsters and scam artists may spoof invoices and other communications to make them look like they come from a well-known Internet company such as Google, eBay, Yahoo or AutoTrader.
- Remember that Internet fraudsters and scam artists may be able to provide you with a VIN number for a real automobile, even if that automobile is not actually owned by them or in their possession.

In the event you believe you have been victimized by a scam of this type, it is recommended that you file a complaint with the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3), which is a partnership between the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the National White Collar Crime Center, and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Information on filing a complaint with the IC3 can be found online at www.ic3.gov. You may also contact the Connecticut Office of the Attorney General at (860) 808-5420 or Attorney General @ct.gov, or file a complaint with the Department of Consumer Protection at trade.practices@ct.gov or by calling the DCP hotline at 800-842-2649.

