



# Consumer Alert

## Beware of On-line Advertising Scams

Free, on-line advertising sites such as Craigslist are great ways of connecting buyers and sellers and promoting local services. However, as with any service or offer, know who you are dealing with before finalizing a transaction. One of the most frequent complaints received over the 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Attorney's Consumer Line include scams on Craigslist and other peer-to-peer advertising sites. People have reported losing several hundreds of dollars in scams that involve up-front deposits for rentals that don't exist. There have also been a number of victims who have been taken by disreputable or unlicensed dealers selling specialty motorcycles or vehicle parts. Once you have decided on a product or service or have found a buyer for your solicited goods, it is important to check the solicitor out. If you are in the market for pricier goods or services, make arrangements to meet the solicitor in person before doing business, and then take the time to verify his or her credentials.

Although sites such as Craigslist have precautions in place to safeguard against abuses, it is ultimately up to the consumer to determine the legitimacy of what is being offered. The same holds true for classified ads in print media, i.e., newspapers.

### **Before closing on a deal:**

- Research the person, business or service being offered. The Better Business Bureau or internet searches will often bring up interesting and helpful information on a person or business. Look for any complaints that have been lodged, and check to see if that business holds memberships to professional associations. Although the latter is no guarantee that a business is ethical, trade associations set standards and business practices that members are expected to adhere to.
- Do not do business with anyone who cannot be present to finalize a deal. Many reported complaints involve 'out-of-country' solicitors who require businesses or consumers to wire money to a third party in exchange for the goods or services. Any solicitor who requires that the money be wired is in all likelihood, a crook. To learn more about money transfer scams, go to [www.westernunion.com/stopfraud](http://www.westernunion.com/stopfraud)
- Know in advance what the market rate is for the product or service you are seeking, particularly if it is a home you would like to rent or buy. Any offer that is exceptionally above or below market rate for that area should raise suspicions.