



Off Campus Housing Referrals

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How to Avoid Rental Scams

Off Campus Housing Referrals has received a number of calls and numerous emails regarding people posing as potential international tenants.

These "SCAM ARTISTS" posing as potential tenants are using our website to contact and request funds from anyone advertising a rental (landlords, property managers and agents). People seeking housemates have been contacted as well.

Most likely, these international tenants will appear very grateful for your offer of housing. They will likely offer to pay you the bulk of their anticipated living expenses up front. Before their arrival in the United States, emergency circumstances will arise whereby this potential tenant contrives that it's necessary for you to send them either funds or access to your bank account. Do not do this.

Please also report to us if you have been solicited for cash payments by someone using this website.

The following article was attained from www.roomiematch.com. After the article is an example rental scam letter. Please read this carefully so that you can learn to avoid such scams.

We've received word of a "roommate scam" that's been circulating around the internet. We're not aware that any subscribers to Roomie Match have fallen for this, but since it is possible someone might, we wanted to post this warning as a public service. No, this is not reason for widespread or undue panic, or non-specific worry about finding a roommate on the internet or anywhere else. The vast majority of folks you could possibly meet from Roomie Match are law-abiding citizens who are not out to illegally "scam" you or anyone else. What this IS is a reminder that with this and all of your other adult endeavors you should exercise good common sense. If you can do that, you need not worry at all about this.

In general, if someone you don't know gives you a check/money order/cashier's check for a large amount of money, don't ever assume it cleared your bank as a valid payment until your bank assures you the deposit was good. Money orders and cashier's checks are forms of immediate payment AS LONG AS THEY ARE NOT FORGED. If you're not extremely familiar with the issuing bank, assume you don't know what one of theirs would look like, no matter how "official-looking" it might seem to you. In addition, sending a relative stranger large amounts of money unnecessarily or as an unnecessary and unrequested "overpayment" is very odd behavior in and of itself. If someone seems to be doing something a reasonable person would find suspicious, don't trust him/her completely and immediately, especially with large amounts of your own money. This is good advice for roommate seeking and really, pretty much anything else in life.

More specifically, the details of the scam are reportedly as follows: Someone contacts you with an interest in renting your room, and would like to secure the room from afar by sending payment in advance. Then they spin a "Tall Tale" (the reasons vary, but all are equally "fishy" and should arouse suspicion in and of themselves) about how they need to send a check/cashier's check/money order for hundreds of dollars MORE than the required amount. After you receive it, you must immediately and with great urgency and speed (meaning, before your bank would be able to completely process the deposit) refund them their "balance" by getting it back to them somehow (mailing them one of your checks back, wire service, etc.). The scam is that the form of payment they sent turns out to be forged, so the money you sent back as their "balance/refunded amount" just comes out of your own pocket, and then you never see or hear from this would-be roommate ever again. If any of your roommate matches say anything vaguely like this to you, tell them you don't want any form of payment that's for more than the amount required for first month's rent, deposit, etc. Not a dollar more than the minimum required to secure the room. Let them know as well that if they ignore your request and send more than the amount required anyway for any reason whatsoever, you'll not be able to refund them any balance until:

1. Your bank has assured you the payment cleared, and this applies to cashier's checks and money orders as well as personal checks and
2. They can pick up their balance in person whenever they're ready to move in with you. You'll not be refunding any "balances" long distance, only in person.

If whoever is a legitimate room seeker, they should have no problem with either, and you can tell them we said so. If they do have a problem and/or continue insisting upon some ridiculous scenario along the lines of that described above, let us know about it immediately and we'll delete their profile. We are also on the lookout for this, but we'd appreciate your assistance as well if you notice something we might not have yet. By this we do mean someone on Roomie Match, and we would need the email address of that subscriber and a copy of the email he/she sent you with the offending details. We don't need you to forward along the latest internet gossip about this, just specific details if you think someone in OUR database is attempting to do something illegitimate with any of our other subscribers, ok? Thanks!

Example Scam Letter

Hello,

How are you doing? Hope God is taking care of you and your family? I am David by name from Macheater (UK) and I am coming for Research in University of Massachusetts by MAY/JUNE 2007 so I need a place to stay. A little about me. I am 24 years old, i gentle, neat, respectful, I mind my own business, no smoking, no overnight guest, no party, I promise to keep the place neat as you ever wanted, my favourite colours are blue and white. I will love to rent from you and I will love to rent for one year but I may extend the rent later so tell me more about the place and I will also appreciate some pictures to the place. If there is any application that I will need to fill plz have it sent to me via email so I could print and bring it over with me when coming over cos> I do not have access to fax machine. I will be happy to rent from you so get back to me as soon as possible. Do tell me the asking price per month and how do i secure it before coming over? Happy New Year to you and your family.

God bless you.

Christ David