EUGENE POLICE NEWS RELEASE

February 9, 2015
For further information, contact:
Melinda McLaughlin, APR, Public Information Director, at 541.682.5124
John Hankemeier, Public Information Coordinator, 541.682.5197

Online Fraud - Deception

On February 5, 2015, police received information about a fraud incident where the suspect, Richard Ray Prozinski, age 51, attempted to rent a property listed online. The victim contacted the suspect, and informed him that they were interested in renting the property. They were then given a business location to meet him and told to bring cash for the initial payment. The victims gave Prozinski the cash and received paperwork to fill out, and contact information. After not hearing back from Prozinski, the victims attempted to contact him but were unsuccessful and only briefly connected through text messaging.

Police followed-up on the information and arrested Prozinski for Theft in the First Degree – Deception, Theft in the Third Degree – Deception, and a warrant for arrest. Following the arrest, Prozinski received an additional charge of Computer Crime for the online ad that was posted to defraud the victim.

How to avoid rental or real estate scams (Information from FTC)

How Rental Scams Work - Scammers know that finding the right apartment or vacation rental can be hard work, and a seemingly good deal is hard to pass up. They’ve been known to game some vacation rental websites and bulletin boards. The take-away: when you’re looking for a rental, it’s caveat renter — renter beware.

Hijacked Ads - Some scammers hijack a real rental or real estate listing by changing the email address or other contact information, and placing the modified ad on another site. The altered ad may even use the name of the person who posted the original ad. In other cases, scammers have hijacked the email accounts of property owners on reputable vacation rental websites.

Phantom Rentals - Other rip-off artists make up listings for places that aren’t for rent or don’t exist, and try to lure you in with the promise of low rent, or great amenities. Their goal is to get your money before you find out.

Signs of a Scam - Being savvy when you’re in search of a rental is well worth the effort. Here are some signs you may be dealing with a scam:
They tell you to wire money - This is the surest sign of a scam. There’s never a good reason to wire money to pay a security deposit, application fee, first month's rent, or vacation rental fee. That’s true even if they send you a contract first. Wiring money is the same as sending cash — once you send it, you have no way to get it back.

They want a security deposit or first month's rent before you've met or signed a lease - It's never a good idea to send money to someone you've never met in person for an apartment you haven’t seen. If you can’t visit an apartment or house yourself, ask someone you trust to go and confirm that it’s for rent, and that it is what was advertised. In addition to setting up a meeting, do a search on the owner and listing. If you find the same ad listed under a different name, that’s a clue it may be a scam.

They say they’re out of the country - But they have a plan to get the keys into your hands. It might involve a lawyer or an “agent” working on their behalf. Some scammers even create fake keys. Don’t send money to them overseas. If you can’t meet in person, see the apartment, or sign a lease before you pay, keep looking. What if the rental itself is overseas? Paying with a credit card or through a reputable vacation rental website with its own payment system are your safest bets.

How to Report Scams - If you find yourself the target of a rental scam, report it to your local law enforcement agency and to the FTC. Contact the website where the ad was posted, too.

###