



THE WAR AGAINST WIRE FRAUD IN 2021

It may come as no surprise that in the last year—with the vast majority of people spending more time at home due to the pandemic—divorce rates increased by 34 percent, birth rates also trended upward, and the number of spam emails and phone calls skyrocketed.

With interest rates low, more people working remotely, and competition often intense for fewer available properties, everything related to real estate seems to be happening at high speed. Winning bidders are often anxious to close on their transactions and are accustomed to doing more of their business online. This may make them more inclined to trust a last-minute email with a change in wiring instructions, making them easy targets for scammers.

Worse yet, wily cybercriminals often begin the wire fraud scheme long before closing day via 'phishing' expeditions, tricking users into inputting information or clicking on a link that allows the scammer to steal login and password credentials. Then they can use these credentials to send false wiring information.

The FBI, title companies, and the American Land Title Association (ALTA) are asking consumers to be especially vigilant for suspicious email messages regarding the transfer of funds. Real estate professionals can help by preparing their clients with tips like these:

1. Be sure your operating system, browser and security software are up to date.

2. Be cautious opening any email attachments—regardless of who sent them—as they may contain malware that can weaken your computer's security and open the door to scammers.

3. Never send your financial information via email, as it is not secure.

4. Anytime you receive instructions emailed from a financial institution, pay attention to the web domain of the sender. Watch for slightly misspelled versions of the domain, such as an added vowel or one different letter (e.g. 'ajones@ameriicanbank').

5. Be aware of any last-minute instructions because wire instructions almost never change. If you receive an email saying they have changed, confirm the message's validity with the real estate agent or title company by phone at the confirmed number.

ALTA has produced a two-minute video on wire fraud protection entitled "Protect Your Money from Wire Fraud Schemes When Buying a Home." The video is available to consumers via YouTube.

As an agent, it's a good idea to be sure your clients have telephone checkpoints with you and the title company, so they can ensure that what they are being instructed to do is legitimate.

In the event that funds are transferred to a fraudulent account, consumers should immediately contact their financial institution and their local FBI office.

Right-Click
and select
"Change Picture"
to replace this
image with an
agent photo
that is
1" wide x 1.25" high

To Insert your logo:
Right click this image
Select "Change Picture"
Choose your logo
Drag corners to
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