



RESIDENTIAL RENTAL SCAMMERS

Combining Fraud with the Risk of Identity Theft

Burnaby, March 21, 2007 – Following the recent incident on Westwood Plateau in which several victims paid cash for the first months rent and damage deposit for the same three-bedroom home, the BC Crime Prevention Association (BCCPA), as part of its contribution to **Fraud Prevention Month**, wishes to draw attention to this common scam and alert would-be renters to the signs of potential rental fraud and equip them with tools to detect fraud.

According to the BCCPA, a legitimate landlord is a credit grantor and is therefore justified in asking applicants for sufficient personal information to enable a credit check to be made, as a prerequisite to approving the application. For the majority of routine rental applications such information should be protected in accordance with the *Personal Information Protection Act* (effective Jan 1 2004) and give no cause for concern, but it is a major worry for victims when the fraudster poses as a landlord and has no legal authority to collect personal information.

Executive Director, Valerie MacLean notes “the victims in this Coquitlam case are stung twice – they not only lose money but they have to worry about possible misuse of their personal information and will have no idea when or where identity theft and fraud will pop up”. She adds:” renters need to be wary and have their antennae up. Often their gut instinct is the best indicator that something is wrong.”

Crime Shield Coordinator Jeff Burton advises the biggest warning sign of potential rental fraud is the “owner” or “landlord” insisting on a months rent/damage deposit in cash and resisting accepting cheques. This prevents the applicant from issuing a “Stop Payment” if the fraud is discovered in time. Other fraud indicators include: an attractive property advertised at well below market price for the area; a landlord who is evasive when asked questions he should know the answers to and is difficult to contact once he has the victims money.

Burton adds:” renters who have concerns about rental advertisements that seems too good to be true should take some additional steps:

- Check with building management, building superintendent, resident manager or caretaker in the case of apartments (emergency contact information is likely posted in the lobby)
- Ask other tenants who they pay their rent to
- Check with municipal hall to confirm ownership of the property in cases where the applicant is looking for a house to rent and compare the ownership name on file with the information provided by the individual claiming to represent the owner.

BCCPA recommends in situations where renters have given out any personal information to any unauthorized person (such as a fraudster posing as a landlord) to contact both Equifax and TransUnion to have their credit files flagged as potential victims of identity theft.

- 30 -

Media Contacts:

Valerie Maclean

Executive Director
BC Crime Prevention Association
604-291-9959 local 226
v.maclean@bccpa.org

Jeff Burton

Crime Shield Coordinator
BC Crime Prevention Association
604-831-1341
j.burton@bccpa.org