

LEON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

RELEASE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION



Larry Campbell, Sheriff

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Detectives Investigating Internet Scams

In recent months, the Leon County Sheriff's Office Financial Crimes Unit has investigated several cases where local citizens have been scammed out of large sums of money over the internet. One of the more common scams involves "Craigslist.com" and "E-Bay Motors." People searching for used vehicles on "Craigslist.com" find a vehicle they are interested in and learn the car will have to be shipped to them. The seller offers to ship the vehicle for free and communicates extensively with the prospective buyer. Scammers often pose as members of the armed forces who are being deployed overseas and must sell their vehicle quickly. Scammers also ask for Western Union payments or even PayPal payments sent as "gifts."

Neither of these forms of payment is generally secure and both may be difficult for law enforcement to trace. Victims receive correspondence indicating that money will be forwarded to "E-Bay Motors" or another independent firm that will hold the payment until the buyer receives the vehicle. When the money is actually transferred, wired or sent, everything disappears from the internet. Vehicle listings are removed and all contact information leads to dead ends. Often, there is no way to recover the funds. Since the theft actually occurs where the money was sent, local law enforcement agencies must send the investigation across the country, or in many cases, around the world.

Legitimate buy/sale/trade oriented web sites have a page or a section devoted to fraudulent practices and things to avoid when dealing with unknown entities over the internet. The Leon County Sheriff's Office recommends that you only deal with known and trusted sites. Being able to see what you are buying in person greatly reduces the chances of being scammed. If you buy over the internet, only deal with registered PayPal users. These can be disputed later if there is a problem. If you send money via PayPal as a "gift," it is gone.

Anyone with questions concerning fraudulent practices over the internet can call the Financial Crimes Unit at (850) 922-3400.

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