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Darien Police: Don't Fall for Overpayment Scam in Online Car Selling

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The Darien Police Department would like to warn residents about a scam that is targeting those attempting to legitimately sell a vehicle using various online services.

When it comes time to buy a car, consumers are more empowered than ever thanks in large part to the Internet and its offerings of car reviews, online vehicle history reports, detailed car listings, and more.

— *an announcement from the Darien Police Department*

The Internet has also, unfortunately, given scammers a new venue to find auto buying and selling victims.

Recently a Darien resident advertised a vehicle for sale online, and once a buyer was located and a deal was reached, a check was mailed for almost twice the amount of the agreed price.

The buyer (scammer) sent instructions that the overpayment was to be given to the “transport service” that would be picking up the car. Thankfully our “would-be victim” saw this as a red flag. Here is how it works:

The overpayment scam:

A legitimate seller posts a car for sale. He or she is then contacted by a prospective “buyer” (really a scammer) who offers to send a cashier’s check immediately plus additional funds to cover shipment of the car overseas. When the check arrives, the seller is instructed to deposit it and wire the overage to the “shipper.” When this is done and the wire transfer picked up, the “buyer” breaks contact and the seller is left on the hook to their bank for the fraudulent check and the missing funds.

How to avoid car buying and selling scams:

- NEVER wire money or use a bank-to-bank transfer in a transaction.
- ALWAYS try to deal locally when buying or selling an automobile or other high-value merchandise
- DO NOT sell or buy a car from someone who is unable or unwilling to meet you face to face.
- WAIT until a check (personal, cashier’s, certified, or otherwise) has cleared the bank to transfer title or the car itself. Funds being made available by a bank DOES NOT mean the check is not counterfeit. Clearing a check can take days or weeks depending on the financial institutions involved. Check with your bank about their particular processes for clearing checks.
- NEVER trust a seller or buyer who says that the transaction is GUARANTEED by eBay, Craigslist, PayPal, or other online marketplace. These sites explicitly DO NOT guarantee that people using their services are legitimate.
- BEWARE sellers or buyers who want to conclude a transaction as quickly as possible. Scammers want to get your money before you have time to think or have a professional examine the deal.
- CALL the buyer or seller to establish phone contact. If the buyer or seller seems to neglect details agreed to via e-mail or is unable to answer questions about their location or the location of the automobile in question, it is likely to be a scam.
- ALWAYS trust your gut. If a deal feels “fishy” or sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Plenty of people use online classified ads to buy and sell cars every day. The vast majority of these transactions are legitimate and go smoothly. Losing out on a “great” deal in order to work with someone you trust could save you big in avoiding a possible scam.

Be Smart. Be Safe.