

Craigslist Scams Apparently On the Rise

January 27, 2012 - According to a report this morning on Fox News' Happening Now, criminal activity on Craigslist is on the rise. Most of the crimes involve scams and theft but there have also been at least twelve murders over the past year that are related to advertisements placed on the website. Just searching news articles on Google using the term Craigslist will give you an idea of the wide variety of crimes it is associated with. But there are things that you can do to protect yourself.

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Let me just start by saying that this article shouldn't be taken as bashing Craigslist; a website that allows users to list just about anything they have for sale or trade. This particular website has changed the world of classified advertising and has made it easier and less expensive to sell items over the internet. Over the past few years, they have provided real value to consumers. But as with any tool, Craigslist and other classified websites can be used for the wrong purposes.

A quick search of Google News will net you articles on scams, identity theft, petty larceny and murder—and that's just on the front page of the search results. While the vast majority of transactions that start out using Craigslist go off without a hitch, that is little solace for anyone who actually becomes a victim.

To protect yourself, you need to keep in mind that anyone you are thinking of buying from, or selling to, is probably someone that you have never met. And a simple phone call to arrange a meeting is not enough time to get to know someone. So here are a few rules that will help to keep you safe.

- If you are setting up an appointment to meet someone for a purchase, agree to meet in a public place.

- If you can, bring a friend or two with you for the meeting. Criminals hate a crowd.
- If the item that you are purchasing or selling is bulky and can't be moved to a public place, then you should absolutely plan to have additional people with you at the meeting.
- Never give out personally identifiable information to people that you meet in this way. Most classified transactions are handled in cash so the parties to the transaction don't have any need for your personal information.
- Finally, trust your instincts. If something about the person you are meeting makes you uncomfortable over the phone or in person, walk away. Better to give up a great deal than to get robbed or killed.

byJim Malmberg

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