

Staying Safe from Settlement Scams

Essential tips for awareness and prevention of scams during the property purchase process



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LAWYERS & NOTARY

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What is a property scam?

A property scam is when fraudsters trick people involved in buying or selling property by pretending to be someone they trust, like their real estate agent or lawyer, and asking for money to be sent to a different bank account. By the time anyone realises the money went to a scammer instead of the right person, the funds are usually gone and very hard to get back. These scams often happen right when people are about to make important payments, like deposits or final settlements.

How do they happen?

1. You receive a very convincing fake email

The scammer pretends to be someone you trust in your property transaction by either hacking their email or creating a very similar email address that looks legitimate.

2. They strike with precision timing

They watch and wait for just the right moment - usually when you're about to make a big payment like your deposit or settlement. That's when they strike with their fake payment instructions.

3. The email seems legitimate

Their emails look completely real - they use proper letterheads, signatures, and even attachments. They create urgency around sending the payment to their "new" bank account.

4. Before you know it, the money is gone

Once you send the money to what you think is the right account, the scammers quickly move it elsewhere, making it nearly impossible to get back.

5. The scam is discovered, but it's too late

Most people only discover they've been scammed when their real agent or lawyer asks why they haven't received the payment. By then, the money is long gone and your bank is most likely unable to recover your funds.

How to protect yourself

Remember to Stop. Check. Protect

STOP:

- Watch for urgency tactics.
- Scammers create panic for you to act immediately with looming deadlines. Don't act until you're sure.

CHECK:

- Always take the time to verify that requests are legitimate.
- Contact us to confirm any requests on a phone number you can verify, such as through a Google search.

PROTECT:

- Don't send sensitive information over email, like payment details.
- Use multi-factor authentication
- Use strong, unique passwords for any property related accounts, including emails and banking
- Ask us about using a free, secure app like PEXA Key for the transaction.

And remember to report scams at scamwatch.gov.au

