

Fake Check Scams

By: OnGuardOnline.gov

No matter the circumstances, don't agree to deposit a check from a stranger and wire money back. If the check bounces, you'll owe the bank any money you withdrew.

The Bait:

You get a response to your ad or online auction posting, offering to pay with a cashier's, personal, or corporate check. At the last minute, the so-called buyer (or the buyer's "agent") comes up with a reason for writing the check for more than the purchase price, and asks you to wire back the difference after you deposit the check.

The Catch:

If you deposit the check, you lose. Typically, the checks are counterfeit, but they're good enough to fool unsuspecting bank tellers and increase the balance in your bank account – for a few days. But when the check eventually bounces, you are liable for the entire amount.

What You Can Do:

Never accept a check for more than your selling price, no matter how tempting the plea or convincing the story. If the buyer sends the incorrect amount, return the check, and don't send the merchandise.

Consider using an online payment service instead; they often offer more protection for both you and the buyer. If you choose to accept checks, ask for a check drawn on a bank with a local branch. That way, you can visit personally to make sure the check is valid. If that's not possible, call the bank the check was drawn on (don't use a phone number given to you by the person who gave you the check). Ask if the check is valid.

Report Online Scams

If you believe you've responded to an online scam, file a complaint with:

- The Federal Trade Commission
- The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center
- Your state Attorney General