

SCAMS REPORT
MILTON TOWNSHIP S.A.L.T. COUNCIL MEETING JULY 12, 2021 (VIRTUAL)
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Car Rental Scams

Individuals planning to travel during the summer months should be aware of car rental scams. These are scams in which fraudsters set up fake online websites that mimic those of legitimate car rental companies and steal money and personal information from their victims.

How it works: You're planning a trip and wish to reserve a car that you'd like to pick up at the airport when you land. You search online for "inexpensive rental cars" and find a cheap rate offered by what appears to be a reputable agency. You decide to reserve a vehicle on the agency's website. You're instructed to complete the online rental agreement and submit it together with a deposit payable by credit card, gift card, or prepaid debit card to secure the reservation. You're told that when you land at the airport, you will need to sign the rental agreement at the agency's desk, pay the balance of the rental charge, and you can be off to your hotel. You're very pleased with the convenience of these arrangements.

When you arrive at the company's rental desk at the airport, you're told there is no record of your reservation. At your urging, the agent checks further and finds that your rental papers do not exist. Any "confirmation" you may have received from your online transaction is bogus and will not help you procure a vehicle. It's clear that you've been scammed. You not only wind up without a car, but you have lost the money you sent for the security deposit and cannot recover it. Your identity was also stolen, and you run the risk of having your personal information sold to other criminals.

How to protect yourself

- Make sure the car rental agency's URL in the address bar of your web browser is correct. Fake URLs sometimes vary from legitimate ones by one or two letters, or they may end in something other than ".com."
- Do not be fooled by a fake website's logo or graphics. Scammers are experts at designing sites that cause victims to believe they are visiting a real site.
- If you're asked to pay a deposit to hold a reservation for a rental car with a gift card or prepaid debit card, you're dealing with a scammer. No legitimate car rental company will ask you to prepay with a gift card. Some legitimate agencies accept prepaid cards at the end of a rental but never for making a reservation.
- If you have concerns about the legitimacy of a company from whom you are considering renting a car, go to the company's official website and find the customer service telephone number. Call the number directly to verify that the company and the rental arrangements are authentic.
- When renting a car, pay with a credit card if possible. The credit card company will intervene if the transaction turns out to be fraudulent, and you will likely not be out any money.
- If you are a victim of this scam, file a report with your local police department. Be sure to routinely monitor your bank and credit card statements for any irregularities.

[Resources: Chicago Tribune, NY Times, AARP]