

Buyer's Fraud CHECKLIST

Begin the Transaction Securely

- Establish at least one trusted phone number for your real estate agent and settlement agent soon after your sales contract is signed.
- **Real estate agents** – phone numbers are often on the contract or listing agreement. You can also trust the brokerage's website or telephone directory.
- **Settlement agent** – you may get a letter or some other “opening” correspondence from the settlement agent. If you visit in person, pick up a business card. You can also trust the settlement agent's website or telephone directory. If your settlement agent is an attorney, their information can be obtained at www.flabar.org.
- Use a more “secure” email address for any correspondence about the transaction. Consider using your work email address because there are generally more firewalls and security protocols. Avoid free, internet-based accounts like Yahoo and Gmail.
- Do not send any personal or private information via email, including your social security number and identification documents. If you wouldn't share the information on Facebook, don't put it in your email!
- Verify any changes to the settlement agent's contact information or wiring instructions either in person or via the trusted phone number given at the beginning of the transaction.

End the Transaction Securely

- If you receive an email changing the timing and/or amounts to be wired to the settlement agent, verify using a trusted phone number or in person.
- Watch out for instructions marked “urgent” or giving a tight deadline (e.g. close of business today). Fraudsters want to create a sense of urgency to get you to act without thinking.
- Watch out for offers from the seller or their real estate agent that are “too good to be true.” For example, if you are negotiating a repair escrow or credit at closing and receive an offer agreeing to resolution for significantly less money if they are paid the balance “today, by wire transfer,” contact your real estate agent or attorney to verify the legitimacy of the offer.
- Never use the phone number given in an email to verify the information contained in the email. Fraudsters often use pre-paid cell phone numbers in these emails and then actually answer the phone when you call, thereby continuing the fraud.
- Be alert for slightly different email addresses from anyone connected with the transaction, for example:

john-doe@bigbank.com vs.
john-doebigbank@gmail.com
- If you are unable to verify the settlement agent's wire instructions via a trusted phone number or in person, wait until you can verify to wire funds.

Closer's Fraud CHECKLIST

Begin the Transaction Securely

- During your first interaction with each party to the transaction, establish at least one trusted phone number to use for contacting the person throughout the transaction.

Consider at least one of the following methods:

- Asking for the information in an engagement letter or intake form.
- Using the contact information listed in the sales contract.
- Asking for the information at an in-person meeting or during an incoming phone call.
- DO NOT rely on telephone numbers solely provided via email. If in doubt, ask the party's real estate agent what phone number they use to contact the party directly.

- Alert buyer, seller and real estate agents in writing that they could be targets for email fraud.
 - Include in engagement or opening letter
 - Include in any emails (e.g., underneath the signature block) and other correspondence
- Inform parties they must verify any changes to contact information or disbursement or wiring instructions either in person or via the trusted phone number given at the beginning of the transaction.
- Inform all parties to not send private information via email, including social security numbers, identification numbers, and bank account information.
- Do not email wiring instructions. Send them via U.S. Mail or give them over the phone.
- If wiring instructions or other disbursement instruction changes are emailed to you, use the trusted phone numbers to verify.
- Inform the parties to the transaction that no monies will be disbursed until wiring instructions are confirmed over the phone.

End the Transaction Securely

- Review payoff and other wiring instructions slowly and carefully for inconsistencies.
- Obtain this information well in advance of closing to give yourself time to review and verify.
- Verify wiring instructions using the trusted phone numbers or in person.
- This includes payoffs to lenders or other creditors, real estate and mortgage brokers, as well as the sellers.
- Verify using a trusted phone number or in person if an email changes the timing and/or amounts to be wired.
- Watch out for instructions marked "urgent" or giving a tight deadline (e.g. close of business today). Fraudsters want you to abandon your verification routine by putting time pressures on you.
- Be alert for slightly different email addresses:
john-doe@bigbank.com vs. john-doebigbank@gmail.com
- If you are unable to verify disbursement instructions via a trusted phone number, wait until you can verify to wire money or write a check.

Seller's Fraud CHECKLIST

Begin the Transaction Securely

- Establish at least one trusted phone number for your real estate agent and settlement agent soon after your sales contract is signed.
- **Real estate agents** – phone numbers are often on the contract or listing agreement. You can also trust the brokerage's website or telephone directory.
- **Settlement agent** – you may get a letter or some other "opening" correspondence from the settlement agent. If you visit in person, pick up a business card. You can also trust the settlement agent's website or telephone directory. If your settlement agent is an attorney, their information can be obtained at www.flabar.org.
- Use a more "secure" email address for any correspondence about the transaction. Consider using your work email address because there are generally more firewalls and security protocols. Avoid free, internet-based accounts like Yahoo and Gmail.
- Do not send any personal or private information via email, including your social security number and identification documents. If you wouldn't share the information on Facebook, don't put it in your email!
- Do not email your bank account wiring instructions. Instead, send them via U.S. Mail, give them over the phone, or take them in person to your real estate or settlement agent.
- If your wiring instructions change after you originally provide them, deliver the new instructions to your real estate or settlement agent in person.
- Learn about and understand the settlement agent's policy on disbursement. Many settlement agents require oral verification of wire instructions before disbursement.

End the Transaction Securely

- Contact your bank to obtain your account's wire instructions well in advance of closing.
- Watch out for offers from the buyer or their real estate agent that are "too good to be true." For example, if you are negotiating a repair escrow or credit at closing and receive an offer agreeing to resolution for significantly less money if they are paid the balance "today, by wire transfer," contact your real estate agent or attorney to verify the legitimacy of the offer.
- Never use the phone number given in an email to verify the information contained in the email. Fraudsters often use pre-paid cell phone numbers in these emails and then actually answer the phone when you call, thereby continuing the fraud.
- Be alert for slightly different email addresses from anyone connected with the transaction, for example:
john-doe@bigbank.com vs. john-doebigbank@gmail.com
- Make sure you are available by phone or in person at closing to verify wire instructions.