

Pet Shipping and Internet Fraud

A new wrinkle on an old scam is currently appearing on the Internet and in local newspapers throughout North America and is costing pet lovers hundreds of dollars. Pet adoption notices are appearing in classified ads online and in print and when pet lovers respond to the ads and wire money, no pets are shipped and the victim usually loses anywhere from \$100 to \$1000 or more. These scams are especially effective due to the almost universal appeal of pets and people's willingness to help others in a tough situation, but as the old saying goes, 'Let the buyer beware.'

How the Pet Shipping Scams Work

A pet lover sees an ad somewhere offering a pet for an unusually low price because the pet owner can no longer keep the pet due to the owner having moved to an African country where the climate is not suitable to the pet's health. Other variations on this involve financial hardship, an unexpected move for employment, or that the pet's lives are in peril from being abandoned. When these ads appear online, they look like legitimate websites and feature pictures of the pet mentioned in the ad, increasing the likeliness of a successful scam.

The pet lover responds to the ad and receives an email from a seemingly legitimate email address requesting a low sum of money, usually just over \$100. Upon receipt of the money wire, the scammers generally request additional money for pet shipping insurance and customs processing costs. Because they have already wired money, victims are inclined to send additional funds to hedge their initial investment and help the animal. But once the funds are sent, no pets are shipped and the seller does not respond to any additional correspondence.

How to Avoid Pet Shipping Fraud

There are a number of red flags which should alert pet lovers to the nature of these scams, but their judgment is often clouded by their fondness for animals. To avoid becoming a victim, look for these warning signs:

- Wiring Money to an Overseas Address—Usually the scams involve sending money to Nigeria, Cameroon, or another African country.
- Unusually Low Prices—Purebred breeds and hard-to-find animals are usually offered at prices well below the market value.
- Follow-Up Requests for More Money—Once a modest sum has been sent, victims usually receive a reply shortly thereafter requesting a larger amount of money.
- Refundable Pet Insurance—Short-term pet insurance for over \$1000 that will supposedly be refunded when the pet arrives is requested.

If you have fallen victim to these scams, you're not alone. Hundreds of pet lovers have unwittingly become victims to pet shipping Internet fraud and the Council of Better Business Bureaus and American Kennel Club have issued warnings about it. Other than reporting the fraud to the authorities, there's little that can be done about recouping the money, but legitimate pet shipping companies are doing their best to alert pet lovers from becoming new victims.

About the Author

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