



10 Tips to Avoid Online Escrow Fraud

1. The easiest and best way to avoid becoming a victim of an online escrow scam is to call the California Department of Corporations toll-free at **1-866-ASK-CORP (1-866-275- 2677)** to make sure the escrow company you plan to use is properly licensed.
2. Never disclose financial or personal information like your Social Security number, credit card number, or bank account information until you have verified that the online escrow company you are using is properly licensed.
3. A buyer or seller who insists on using a particular online escrow company is probably trying to steer you towards a fraudulent escrow services site.
4. Watch out for escrow company sites that don't have an address and phone number listed. If the site does list a phone number, call the number and be sure you speak to a live person. A generic voice mail is a sign that the company may be fraudulent.
5. Send the escrow company an e-mail question. If you don't receive a response, don't do business with them.
6. Sometimes a phony escrow company Web site can be detected by its sloppy content, with spelling and grammar errors and inconsistent information. Other times, the site's information may have been copied from legitimate escrow company sites.
7. Find out how the online escrow service processes transactions. Steer clear of sites that don't process their own, but require users to set up accounts with online payment services instead. Legitimate escrow companies don't use person-to-person money transfers like Western Union or MoneyGram or direct you to send your payment to an individual rather than a corporate entity.
8. Fake escrow company sites often display logos from the Better Business Bureau, VeriSign Secure, TRUSTe, and even the Internet Fraud Complaint Center. Check to make sure the escrow company really is endorsed by these organizations.
9. Avoid escrow company sites with domain names ending in .org, .biz, .cc, .info., or .US.
10. Be wary of a seemingly terrific deal. Scammers post online classified ads and offer items via online auction with very low prices. Remember, these so-called "deals" are just the hook to get you to use a phony escrow company site.