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TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND INSURANCE AND TENNESSEE ATTORNEY GENERAL WARN OF SCAM USING FORGED COMMISSIONER'S SIGNATURE

Nashville – The Tennessee Department of Commerce & Insurance (TDCI) and the Tennessee Attorney General's Office are warning consumers about a scam business that utilizes a forged signature of TDCI Commissioner Carter Lawrence.

As part of the scam, a listing is placed on Facebook Marketplace for a nonexistent tractor for sale. Thus far, the "seller" uses a generic woman's name and quickly directs buyers to contact Hartley Logistics. Hartley is an entity which claims to be based in Memphis, TN and claims to have possession of the tractor. In addition to inquiries about Hartley Logistics, TDCI has also received inquiries involving a shipping company, also out of Memphis, called Grimwood Shipping, Inc.

The marketplace listing entices buyers to transfer money to a nonexistent "escrow company" that has an "escrow agreement" purportedly approved by Commissioner Lawrence. As part of the scheme, Hartley Logistics asks buyers to provide their Social Security number, picture of their driver's license, and a current selfie as proof of identity. Once the information is provided and the money is transferred, the scammer takes off with the funds.

"I am shocked and angered that scammers would use my name in order to target our state's hard-working agricultural community," said TDCI Commissioner Carter Lawrence. "If you are approached by someone about this so-called deal who claims to represent me or our department, do not send them any money and contact the Tennessee Attorney General's Office immediately."

This fraudulent activity can be reported to the Attorney General's Office using the online consumer complaint form found at www.tn.gov/consumer. In addition, complaints can also be submitted to [Facebook](#) and the [Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\) Internet Crime Complaint Center \(IC3\)](#).

"Online platforms can be great for connecting buyers and sellers, but consumers should watch out for deals that look too good to be true," said General Skrmetti. "And scammers should beware the very real consequences of selling fake tractors in Tennessee."



TDCI and the Attorney General's Office encourage consumers to review the following tips to help protect their sensitive information and their hard-earned money:

- Always be wary when a Facebook Marketplace transaction leads to being asked for personally identifying information such as your social security number.
- If possible, meet the seller in person to exchange the item and the payment at the same time. Bring another person along as an added precaution and/or meet in a safe location such as one near a police station.
- Search online for the company or product name with words like “review,” “complaint,” or “scam” as a previous victim may have posted a warning.
- Research the address. Be aware that a scammer may use a random U.S. address to appear local, or in many cases, may use the physical address of a shipping store or post office to fake legitimacy.
- Look closely at both the seller's profile and the website of any coordinating business they may direct you to. Does it include typos and grammatical errors? When was the profile and/or the website created? Brand-new accounts and websites should be a red flag.
- Beware of buyers and sellers who insist on communicating or receiving payments outside of the social media platform's official channels.
- Enlist the review and assistance of trusted friends, family members, or better yet, a licensed attorney before committing your funds – especially if it's a large purchase such as a used vehicle or farm equipment.
- Pay with credit card when possible so that you can benefit from the built-in fraud protections that credit cards provide.
- Never buy anything from online sellers that accept payment only by gift cards, money transfers through companies like Western Union or MoneyGram, or cryptocurrency.
- Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it likely is. Know that scammers often use stories of military deployment, medical emergencies, divorce, and other hardships to indicate why they are willing to sell an expensive product at a low price. These same excuses will be used by overseas scammers for reasons why they can't meet you in person.
- Stay in the know. Get news alerts about the latest scams and important consumer information from the FTC sent right to your inbox by visiting www.ftc.gov/scams. You may also visit [here](#) to see FTC's 2022 data regarding social media scammers.

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