



District Attorney's Office • 18th Judicial District

George H. Brauchler, District Attorney • Arapahoe, Douglas, Elbert & Lincoln Counties

Fraud Alert

Online Pet Scams Tug at Wallets; Heart Strings

Who hasn't been drawn in by an adorable puppy or kitten on a website or through a classified ad? For purebred pet lovers, these may be logical first places to search for a pedigree dog or cat, particularly if the breed of choice is too expensive or not available through a local breeder. Not surprisingly, scammers have found a way to *fill the void*; leaving unsuspecting victims heartbroken and out a great deal of cash. Indicators of this scam are as follows: shoppers search online through web-based classified ads for a preferred breed, and are directed to a particular website. The site displays photos of available pets, including their health and other characteristics. To sway potential buyers into believing they are on a legitimate site, there often is a fake screening process, usually a questionnaire, that ensures the pet will be going to a "good home". Emotionally hooked, the buyer sends money but never receives the pet. Before victims realize they've been scammed, the crook demands more money for a costly crate or pet delivery service, and/or for medical care and vaccinations. Once the second payment is sent, victims are then informed the animal is coming from overseas and must be quarantined, thus allowing the perpetrators to continue hitting the victim up for other false charges. Young people are often the victims.

Safety precautions:

As with all unfamiliar sites on the internet, confirm the legitimacy of the company & site before making a purchase. The Better Business Bureau keeps a national base of verifiable businesses at <https://www.bbb.org>. Interested buyers should also enter the business name in a search engine to read what pops up. This often gives shoppers insight as to the number and type of complaints. Always call the seller to get more information such as additional costs, location of the animal, preferred method of payment, etc. Note that wire service requests are suspicious since the money can't be traced after it reaches its destination. Another red flag is if there's no phone number to speak to a live person.

Reputable breeders should be registered, meaning they have documentation that attests to the sire and dam (parents) of the litter, litter date of birth, and breeder's name and address. Many purebred breeders also offer adoption services – important to note if cost is a factor. The American Kennel Club (AKC) keeps a data base of all registered breeders. For information on AKC, or to find local registered breeders, go to <https://www.akc.org>. Equivalent sites for registered feline breeders are the Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) <http://www.cfa.org> and The International Cat Association (TICA) <https://www.tica.org/>.

Stick to local registered breeders if possible. Home visitations can reveal a lot, such as the cleanliness of the environment and interaction between pets and people. It also provides the prospective owner the opportunity to ask additional questions.

Online scams should be reported to the Crime Complaint Center at <https://www.ic3.gov>.