



Greek wedding ends in big fat \$45,000 scam loss

A Perth real estate agency is believed to have lost more than \$45,000 in an elaborate accommodation scam which also involved them organising a Greek interpreter for a fictitious wedding.

The agency, which deals with short-term and long-term holiday rentals, received a call last month from a man claiming to be from England requesting to book one week's accommodation for a wedding party of eight people. The man provided the name '**Colonel Michael Warner**' – a name well known to Consumer Protection as one that is commonly used by Nigerian-based scammers.

After paying a large deposit for the accommodation using what are believed to have been several stolen British credit cards, the scammers requested the agency forward funds supposedly to a Greek interpreter who couldn't accept credit card payments.

Funds were also sent back to various third parties with the fraudsters using tactics of a common 'overpayment' scam. The money was transferred before the agency realised the funds from the credit card transaction had not been deposited into their trust account.

Acting Commissioner for Consumer Protection David Hillyard said, while an investigation is being carried out into this particular case, other real estate agents and accommodation providers should be aware of this 'overpayment' scam and exercise caution.

"These scammers prey on the desire of people working in the hospitality and services industries to help customers in whichever way they can. However, in this case, that mind-set has proven very costly for the business targeted," Mr Hillyard said.

"It has become a common scam for accommodation bookings to be made either by phone or email using false or stolen credit card details and a payment greater than the amount payable is then supposedly made. The scammers then request the excess amount to be refunded immediately, but usually by wire transfer or to a different account.

"Victims of this scam send the refund or pay a third party before the cheque bounces or credit card payment is reversed because it was a fraudulent transaction.

"The best advice we can give to businesses is to do a bit of simple research first. A simple internet search would have raised serious questions in this instance.

"If deciding to proceed with a transaction only refund money into the credit card or bank account used to make a booking or purchase. If someone booking accommodation pays too much, wait until the funds have cleared and are confirmed to be in your bank account before making any refund payments.

"Be extremely cautious if someone who is making accommodation bookings pays too much or pays extra so that funds can be transferred to a third party. If in doubt, contact Consumer Protection for further advice."

For information on scams visit www.scamnet.wa.gov.au or enquiries can be made by emailing wascamnet@commerce.wa.gov.au or calling **1300 30 40 54**.