

Consumer Information from Mid Oregon Credit Union

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Avoid scams when buying vehicles online

LOS ANGELES (10/5/11)--New-vehicle sales forecasts for September are better than expected, which may indicate the U.S. economy is improving, or at least not slipping back into recession (*LATimes.com* Sept. 27).

According to J.D. Power & Associates, strong retail sales over the Labor Day weekend, coupled with other vehicle sales such as fleet purchases, helped boost new-car sales figures, resulting in a seasonally adjusted annualized rate for total vehicle sales forecast to be 9% higher than September of 2010 (*JDPower.com* Sept. 22).

While new-car sales are improving, many consumers opt for buying used vehicles. The internet allows consumers to research options and buy used vehicles through online classifieds. Unfortunately, scammers also are finding internet classifieds a ripe hunting ground.

These tactics can help you avoid scams if you use the internet to buy a car:

- *Background check.* Learn more about your seller. Many online classifieds offer feedback tools. Review the comments and ratings from other users and insist on speaking with the seller on the phone to get a better understanding of the person on the other end of the deal.
- *Vehicle visit.* Avoid buying a vehicle sight unseen. Visit the seller and the vehicle, or ask a friend or relative to check out the vehicle if it's located in another area. Inspect the car's condition and obtain the vehicle identification number so you may review the title and investigate the car's history.
- *Mechanic's inspection.* If the visit shows the car to be promising, insist on a professional mechanic's inspection. And if the seller balks, you walk.
- *Pay in person.* Never send money through a wire service to pay for your vehicle, and be careful paying with cash. Your best bet is to visit your credit union to obtain a cashier's check or to use a personal check to make your purchase. Pay for your vehicle in person and be sure to get a receipt and transfer of title.

File a complaint with the Federal Bureau of Investigation via the Internet Crime Complaint Center if you suspect you've been the victim of a scam when buying a car online.

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