Pet Scams On The Rise:
Tips To Help You Identify Frauds

Holly Lake Ranch, Texas—Scammers are luring pet lovers out of thousands of dollars with photos of cute puppies, heart-breaking stories and irresistible prices. Scammers are becoming increasingly savvy. Sometimes it is difficult to determine if it is a scam, until it is too late. Here are some tips on identifying pet scams and how to purchase a pet safely.

Many scams begin with an advertisement. Once you respond, most likely over e-mail, you will soon learn that the animal is located overseas. They tell you that once you pay the shipping fees, usually by Western Union or MoneyGram, the animal will be part of your family. But additional costs will soon follow – extra shipping costs, customs clearance fees, vaccinations, and insurance. After sending thousands of dollars, you learn there is no animal.

Fraudwatchers.org, a non-profit anti-scam organization manned entirely by volunteers, has seen an increase in pet scams over the past couple of years. In 2009, the number of pet scam postings on the site more than doubled that of past years combined.

Before sending any money or continuing to work with an overseas party, read these tips:

• Always insist that the seller enter into a formal contract. The document should detail the method of transportation, timeframe, the airline of carriage, all associated costs, and copy of the health certificate.

• Check references. If the seller indicates that a specific company will handle the shipping, get complete details for the shipping company and then check them out! Use Google to research them and call them to confirm that they know the breeder.

• Check affiliations. In order to convey authenticity, scammers may claim to be a member of the Independent Pet and Animal Transportation Association International (IPATA). If this is the case, simply look up their company name in the IPATA member
directory (visit www.ipata.com and click on “Find a Pet Shipper”). If they are not in the directory, they are not a member.

- **Examine the website.** Scammers copy websites for reputable companies – making it even harder to identify them. Examine the site, look for poor grammar, inconsistencies, and misspellings (especially in the email address), and confirm international phone numbers (www.countrycallingcodes.com/Reverse-Lookup.php).

- **Check the phone number.** Insist that you get a phone number from the seller. Then test the number to make sure a real person answers, even if it’s a long distance international call. In order to avoid communication, scammers may claim to be hearing impaired.

- **Most importantly – Be wary of sending funds by Western Union or MoneyGram!** Scammers will tell you this is the most inexpensive and fastest way of doing business. Most reputable dealers will request that you wire transfer funds to their company bank account or will accept a credit card or PayPal payment.

“Scammers play on emotions with cute photos or stories that the animal needs to be rescued from harm,” says Sally Smith, president of IPATA. “The virtual world provides untraceable websites, disposable e-mail addresses and instant money transfers – a conman’s paradise. Every day these scams look more legitimate so it is important to know the ways to identify the frauds.”

If you do want to purchase a pet, you should work with a legitimate breeder or retailer in your own country. If you are on a tight budget, or you really need to find a pet quickly, please consider visiting a pet shelter in your community. Purchasing an animal through legitimate sources may be a lengthier process or more expensive, but it is secure and you will actually receive an animal.


**About IPATA**

The Independent Pet and Animal Transportation Association International, Inc. (IPATA) is a non-profit, worldwide trade association for animal handlers, pet moving providers, kennel operators, veterinarians and others who are dedicated to the care and welfare of pets and animals during transport. The organization was founded in 1979 – it began with six founding members and now has more than 325 members in 69 countries. IPATA serves its
members, the pet transport industry, and the public at large. For more information, or to find a professional pet shipper, visit www.ipata.com.

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