



PREVENTIVE LAW SERIES
ONLINE/INTERNET AUCTIONS



Prepared by:
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ELECTRONIC COMMERCE

Auction websites allow both buyers and sellers the opportunity to conduct business from homes. Many of us may think that online Internet auctions offer good deals, but complaints about fraudulent auction websites are growing at an alarming rate. What follows are a few suggestions to protect yourself from being defrauded.

1. Understand how the auction website operates. Every auction site has its own rules, policies, and procedures. Make sure you are aware of the rules of the particular online Internet auction site you are participating in.
2. Spend some time on the site before you actually start bidding. Check www.fbi.gov, www.scambusters.org, and the FTC (see below for website) for complaints.
3. Research the product that you are bidding on by checking the price of the product with local retailers and other websites. Do not assume that you are always getting a bargain on an online Internet auction site.
4. Research the seller by contacting the Better Business Bureau. Review the seller's feedback from other buyers, if available.
5. Acquire as much information as possible about the seller, including name, address, and telephone number. If the address consists solely of a P.O. Box or is only an overseas address, be cautious about doing business with them.
6. Contact the seller by phone before completing any transaction to confirm the details of the transaction, discuss payment, and discuss shipping methods. Ask the seller about any warranties or guarantees that accompany the product. If there are warranties or guarantees that accompany the product, be sure to get them in *WRITING*.
7. Choose a payment method that can be documented and leaves traces such as credit card payments or checks.
8. Use a traceable shipping method such as UPS or Federal Express and insist on insurance.
9. Keep a log of all conversations. Make a hard copy/print out all e-mails sent, product offerings, and the bidding history.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

A legal assistance attorney is available by appointment Monday through Thursday from 0800 -1030 and 1300 - 1500, and Friday from 0900 -1100. Powers of attorney and notaries are available Monday through Friday at the same times. For more information, please contact the Legal Assistance Office, located in Building 56, 32nd Street Naval Station, San Diego, CA, by telephone at (619) 556-2211, or our office at Naval Air Station North Island – Coronado, Building 318 – Second Deck, above the Fleet and Family Support Center, Saufley Road, by telephone at (619) 545-6437.

RESOURCES

Federal Trade Commission: (877) FTC-HELP; www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0009-military-families

- Consumer Information: www.consumer.ftc.gov; (877) FTC-HELP
- File a Consumer Complaint: www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov

Better Business Bureau San Diego Field Office: (858) 496-213; www.sandiego.bbb.org

National Fraud Information Center Internet Fraud Watch: (800) 876-7060

San Diego District Attorney Economic Fraud and Environmental Protection Division: (619) 531-4070

Internet Crime Complaint Center <http://www.ic3.gov>
California DOJ <http://oag.ca.gov/consumers>