



## BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU® NEWS RELEASE

### **BBB Scam Alert: Beware of Puppy Scams This Holiday Season: *Updated Findings from BBB Study Reveals the problem continues.***

*December 20, 2018*, - If you are shopping for a pet this holiday season, watch out for scams. Few things pull at a person's heartstrings like an adorable puppy or cuddly kitten. Scammers know this. And as more consumers turn to the internet to find new pets, they will be met with a slew of heart tugging ads. However, a recent BBB investigative study found that some of those sponsored internet advertisements about pets may be fake.

#### **How the Scam Works**

You find an adorable puppy on a website or online ad. Sometimes, scammers claim they are breeders or pet sellers. Other times, they act like a distraught pet owner who must find a new home for their beloved dog or cat. Either way, once you inquire about the pet, they ask you to wire money to complete the purchase.

The "seller" then promises your pet will be shipped right away. But there are always "unexpected" problems: The airline requires a specific pet crate, you must pay for an expensive vet visit, or the shipper requires costly pet insurance; all of which are asked to be paid in advance. With each problem, scammers promise that they will refund the unexpected costs as soon as your pet is delivered. Unfortunately, in many cases, the pet is never delivered and neither is the refund.

“Scammers love to try to take advantage of people when they are in high stress or emotional states and the excitement of buying a new pet can cloud good judgement, especially around the holidays.” said Lori Wilson, president and CEO of BBB serving the San Francisco Bay Area and Northern Coastal California.

#### **According to the latest BBB data:**

- In the last 3 years, BBB has received nearly 10,000 complaints and scam reports to BBB Scam Tracker from consumers about “businesses” selling puppies and dogs. (The FTC estimates only about 10% of victims report these crimes – so the problem is likely to be more widespread).
- Over 5,000 legitimate and illegitimate business entities were listed in consumer complaints and scam reports including: dog breeders, dog farms, dog boarders



and kennels, pet stores, and others.

- Approximately 60% of reports to BBB regarding dog sellers indicated that the consumers allegedly never received the pets they had purchased.
- Other complaints include: receiving animals that had health and/or genetic problems, and not receiving proper documentation for the pet.

BBB recently conducted an investigative study of online puppy scams. The study looked at the scope of this problem, who is behind it, and the need for heightened enforcement and consumer education to address the issue. You can read the [full study here](#) or [download a PDF here](#).

### **Tips to Protect Yourself from Pet Scams:**

- **Never wire money to people or companies you don't know and trust.** Once money is wired, it is gone for good. The same goes for pre-paid debit cards or gift cards. Always use a credit card in case you need to dispute the charges. *Note: If anyone asks you to pay for anything with a gift card, you may be dealing with fraud.*
- **Do an internet search of the picture of the pet you are considering.** If the same picture appears on multiple websites, you may be dealing with a fraud. You also can search for text from ads or testimonials to see if the seller copied it from another site.
- **Research prices for the breed you are interested in adopting or purchasing.** If someone is advertising a purebred dog for free or at a deeply discounted price, you could be dealing with a fraudulent offer. Also, if they are stating that they register their dogs with a specific organization or registry, you can confirm by contacting the registry or organization directly.

“Buying a pet is a process and scammers do their best to get straight to your finances,” said Brandi Hunter, VP of PR and Communications, AKC. “If something sounds too good to be true, it likely is. Responsible sources will take some time and diligence, but it will lead to the best end result of finding the dog that will fit your family.”

If you have been a victim of a puppy scam report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#).

**ABOUT BBB:** For more than 100 years, the Better Business Bureau has been helping people find businesses, brands and charities they can trust. In 2017, people turned to BBB more than 160 million times for BBB Business Profiles on more than 5.2 million businesses and Charity Reports on 11,000 charities, all available for free at [bbb.org](#). There are local, independent BBBs across the United States, Canada and Mexico.



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