

VACANT AND AGRICULTURAL LAND SCAMS

What Realtors® Need to Know

Over the last few months, Minnesota Realtors® has received reports of scammers impersonating “out-of-town” property owners. These schemes frequently target vacant or agricultural land, where fraudsters attempt to push through a quick sale.

Here’s how the scam typically works:

- The scammer poses as a property owner and contacts a listing agent—most often by email.
- They claim to live abroad or out of state and want to sell land they “own.”
- The name they use matches the name on the property title, and in some cases, they even provide a fake ID that appears legitimate.
- Generally, all communication takes place electronically. The listing contract is e-signed, an offer is accepted, and the transaction moves forward—all without the true owner’s knowledge.
- The buyer believes they are purchasing property, but at closing the fraud is exposed, creating serious legal and financial consequences.

The National Association of Realtors® (NAR) has issued warnings about these scams in recent years. Below, we’ve highlighted NAR’s guidance along with a Minnesota-specific update and resource link.

Red Flags: Common Scamming Tactics

If a potential client asks you, as a real estate professional, to sell a vacant parcel or unoccupied property—watch out for one or more of the following:

- The potential client wants to list the property for significantly below market value.
- The potential client has a strong preference or requirement for cash.
- The potential client does not want a “For Sale” sign in the yard.
- The potential client emphasizes an urgency to sell quickly.
- The potential client never communicates in person or on video, preferring to text or email.
- The potential client claims to be out of the state or country.
- The potential client will only use a remote notary and requests a remote closing.

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Recommend Practices: What to Do if You Encounter a Suspected Scam

- Exercise due diligence to verify the purported seller is the actual property owner, for example:
 - Ask for multiple forms of identification.
 - Request to meet the seller face-to-face (Possibly using Facetime, Teams or Zoom if out of state or country).
 - Ask for proof of ownership of the property.
 - Ask the potential client about the area around the vacant property to see if they are familiar with the area.
- Conduct independent research to confirm the property owner, such as looking online for a recent photo or speaking to a neighbor. (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and other platforms may offer valuable insights)
- Verify the seller's email and phone number.
- Make sure you or the title company select the remote notary at closing.
- Ask the seller for a voided check and a disbursement authorization form; use a wire verification service to confirm the account information and ownership.
- If you suspect that you are involved in a vacant lot scam:
 - Contact law enforcement and the Minnesota Attorney General's Office
 - File complaint at [IC3.gov](https://ic3.gov).
 - Remove the listing from the MLS and take down any advertisements quickly