

Your property is probably the most valuable thing you will ever own. But did you know fraudsters can try to steal it from under you even while you are living in it?

Protect your property



If you already own a property, or are thinking of buying one, it is important to be aware of these fraud risks. Simple precautions can protect you.

What is property title fraud?

This is when a fraudster changes the registered details of your property to create the appearance that they own your house or land. To do this they will often pretend to be you or someone else normally involved in a property purchase or sale – perhaps a potential buyer or seller, a mortgage lender or a conveyancer.

Unregistered titles

If your home is one of the million or so properties not yet registered with HM Land Registry, your risk is greater. A fraudster could forge some paper deeds, use them to register your property in their name, apply for a mortgage or make a sale to an unwitting buyer – and then disappear with the cash.

If you own an unregistered property, think seriously about voluntarily registering it with HM Land Registry. This gives you valuable legal protection when it comes to property title fraud.

Registered titles

Registered properties are also not risk free. The pattern is the same: the fraudster impersonates the true owner and tries to transfer the registration of the property into their own name in order to sell it or acquire a mortgage. After a fraudulent transaction of this kind the true owner's registration can normally be restored. But the stress and inconvenience is far better avoided by staying vigilant.

While all homeowners and properties are at risk, some are more vulnerable than others.

Owners who are:

- Absent (eg, extended holiday, living abroad, in a care home or hospital)
- Landlords
- Deceased
- Long-standing
- Sole

Properties which are:

- Not registered with HM Land Registry
- Not mortgaged
- Rented out
- High value
- Empty

CONVEYANCING

This legal term means the transfer of a house or building's legal title from one person to another.



HM Land Registry



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Four simple steps can protect you and your property



1. Register your property with HM Land Registry

If your property is not already registered with HM Land Registry, you should consider applying for voluntary registration. This is an easy and effective way to protect yourself and your home. It creates an official record that can be checked by anyone who needs to confirm your ownership (such as a solicitor or estate agent).

Registration also makes your title more secure and provides extra legal protections. For example, if you do suffer a loss from this kind of fraud you might be entitled to compensation from HM Land Registry (depending on the circumstances).

2. Keep your registered details up-to-date

Make sure that HM Land Registry always has your correct name and address. They may need to send you official letters or notices which can act as an early sign of fraud. It's simple to update your details, so make any changes immediately.

3. Keep a close eye on your register entries

This is easier than you might think. Simply sign up to HM Land Registry's free property alert service. If someone tries to change the register for your property (perhaps as part of a fraudulent mortgage application), you will be notified immediately.

You can use the service to monitor up to 10 properties. Changes to the register won't be blocked automatically, but you will be told about them so that you can take swift action.

4. Restrict your property title

If you or your property are at particular risk of fraudulent transfers, mortgage applications or register tampering, you might also want to consider applying for a 'restriction' to be placed on your title. (A small fee may be applicable.) In the event of an attempted sale, a title restriction requires the conveyancer to formally certify that it really is the legitimate owner who is making the sale.

This service is also available to business owners.

Rental properties Properties rented out can be particularly vulnerable to fraud.

Fraudsters often gain physical control simply by posing as tenants. Paying their rent months in advance (a common warning sign) buys them the time they need to complete a sale or mortgage application and to flee with the proceeds, all before anyone suspects anything.

If HM Land Registry alerts you to unusual activity relating to your property registration, contact them immediately. It could be a warning sign of fraud.

Reporting fraud

If you think you're the victim of property title fraud, report it immediately to:

HM Land Registry

0300 006 7030
reportafraud@landregistry.gov.uk

Action Fraud

0300 123 2040
actionfraud.police.uk

You may also wish to consider speaking to a solicitor or a Citizens Advice Bureau for more advice and guidance.



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