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Seller beware! Car bought with fake check prompts warning from Ramsey County prosecutor

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The Ramsey County attorney's office wants sellers to take extra precautions when dealing with private buyers after a recent truck sale gone bad.

Olaf Hientje Beckmann, 43, has been charged in Ramsey County District Court with one count each of offering a forged check, motor vehicle theft and theft by swindle in connection with the Sept. 17 sale of a truck over the Internet.

Beckmann, representing himself as Steven R. Olson, contacted the owner of a 2001 Ford Ranger through the Car Soup website on Sept. 16, according to the criminal complaint. He looked at the vehicle at the woman's residence in Golden Valley. They then arranged to meet at the Ramada Inn in Roseville on Sept. 17.

Beckmann met with her at the hotel and presented a check for \$4,600 from a local credit union, the complaint said. The seller signed over the title and handed the keys to Beckmann.

On Sept. 19, the woman's bank reported the check as fraudulent, the complaint said.

Beckmann, who has no known address, is being held in the St. Louis County jail on similar charges, the county attorney's office said. He's also been charged with similar crimes in Hennepin County.

He has 27 prior felony convictions for theft by swindle, felony theft, fraud, burglary and receiving stolen property, according to the complaint.

"This case serves as a precautionary tale to those who would sell anything over the internet or in

person," said county attorney John Choi.

The attorney's office has

offered the following tips for preventing fraud:

• Don't rush through a transaction to get a sale.

• Always ask for a driver's license and record the buyer's information.

• Save the buyer's contact information.

• Before accepting a check or money order, contact the issuing bank to verify its authenticity. Better yet, insist on an electronic transaction.


• Don't transfer the title until the check or electronic deposit has cleared.

• Never provide personal or financial information to the buyer via email.

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