

Halton police reverse field on CRA phone scammers

By Tim Whitnell
Metroland Media Group

Halton Regional Police officers turned the tables on apparent fraud artists recently by phoning them directly and grilling them about what they do.

Det.-Sgt. Troy Izlakar, head of Halton police's fraud unit, said a retired Halton officer called late last week to let them know he had been contacted by someone claiming to be a representative of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), the federal government's taxation arm.

In the scam, typically the caller claims to be a CRA rep and tells the person they are calling that they owe back taxes to the government and to send payment as soon as possible, usually by wire transfer, or else the police will arrest them.

The retired cop recorded the phone number that was left on his answering machine when the supposed CRA person called. He gave it to Halton police.

That led to several of the fraud unit's officers making about a dozen calls to that number over about an hour last Friday while they were at

home and off duty. They did not identify themselves as police officers and weren't asked if they were, said Izlakar.

The number police were given and called was 1-844-210-4888.

Izlakar advises the public to take note of the number and ignore it if they come across it.

Don't engage just hang up. Don't send money no matter how convincing they sound.

He says no one should call that number, or any number they aren't familiar with, even if it looks legitimate; their own phone number and possibly their name might be displayed at the other end of the phone line and seen by an apparent scammer.

They (can) spoof the number (they use) to make it look like it's coming from the CRA or a police service, said Izlakar.

With March being Fraud Prevention Month, Izlakar said his officers had a bit of fun at the scammers' expense last week when they called the number they were provided.

We're a little sick and tired of seeing people victimized by this and took it upon ourselves to see what the deal was, Izlakar said of the reason

for engaging the scammers.

They wanted to know our name and phone number and how much we had in the bank.

He said the officers would say they had a certain amount of money in the bank, to see what the person would say. One officer said he had \$3,500 and another said \$83,000. The response would typically be that the amount they owed in taxes was about \$1,000 less than whatever was stated.

One person said to send the supposed tax funds owed to Pakistan.

They told one of our officers the RCMP is coming for them. The caller (scammer) didn't know what RCMP stood for, said Izlakar.

We asked for their opinion on the Toronto Blue Jays but they didn't have a clue. They spoke decent English but you could tell it wasn't their first language, he said, noting police believe that most of these types of callers are based outside Canada.

Everything for these guys is scripted. They don't have a lot of local (area) knowledge or about the CRA, and they started to become angry and frustrated with the line of questioning

from the officers posing as regular residents, said Izlakar.

While we're talking to them, they aren't defrauding other people. If we can frustrate them and keep them from speaking to a real citizen who will be fooled by this, then we've done our job.

He said that after about an hour of calls from the officers, it got to the point where no one picked up the phone at the other end.

Izlakar has been head of the fraud unit for more than a year. He said it's the first time the unit has employed the callback tactic since he joined the unit.

He said they might employ the practice from time to time.

The Halton police fraud unit consists of 14 officers. One half investigates corporate crime and the other half is a card team that looks after credit and debit card cases, counterfeiting and email fraud.

Anyone with information or concerns about potential frauds can call Halton police at 905-634-1831 or contact the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre at 1-888-495-8501 or visit bit.ly/25kljOw.



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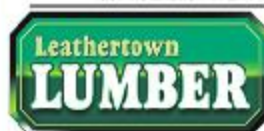


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