

Woman not fooled by shopper scam

By LISA TALLYN
Staff Writer

Halton Regional Police fraud unit Det.-Sgt. John Mans said the mystery shopper scenario is one of the most common scams or schemes police come across in Halton, "We get about one call per week about the mystery shopper," Mans said, noting it is only exceeded in popularity by the 'grandson' scam, where someone calls claiming to be a grandson and in desperate need of money to be sent to them quickly.



Patty Talana and the bogus cheque that was mailed to her to be a 'mystery shopper'. Halton Police say the scam is a common one in the area.

Photo by Ted Brown

People who claim to be able to fix a problem with your computer from a remote location, for a fee, is also a common fraud, he said.

As for the mystery shopper scam, Mans said people who are able to get a bank to cash the cheque sent to them could be held responsible to pay the entire amount of the funds back to the bank. However, since the bank itself was duped into cashing the cheque it doesn't usually demand the person reimburse them for the full amount, he said.

Most reports Mans sees now related to mystery shopping contain information relayed by a wary public, not complaints from people who said they sent money and now think they've been

scammed.

"So people are learning. If it's too good to be true, it usually is. People just need to take a little time to check these things out," said Mans.

"We're finding more and more lately that the money (wiring) services are speaking to (questioning) these people," trying to send money along to others via services like MoneyGram or Western Union, he added.

A Georgetown woman immediately knew that a cheque mailed to her was a scam and she wants other people to be aware of it so they don't become victims.

Last week, Patty Talana received a \$3,993 cheque from a company and a letter informing her that after checking her references and resume she had been selected to be a mystery shopper even though she had never applied for the job. It outlined her pay, and how she could move up in the company.

She was to deposit the cheque at her bank, then make two Western Union transfers to women in the amount of \$1,750 and \$1,453. She was also instructed to call a number to get her mystery shopper assignments at retailers Walmart, Kmart, Home Depot, Best Buy, Sears and J.C. Penney.

Talana, who worked in banking for 25 years, said those who get taken in by the scam would be out the money they transferred when the cheque doesn't clear.

She contacted Halton Police, who put her in touch with the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, where she said they were aware of the scam.

"I'm afraid because it (the cheque) does look very professional. It's clearly a cheque that can be negotiated," said Talana. "Somebody that doesn't know could fall prey to this."

Recently, a similar incident occurred in Burlington.

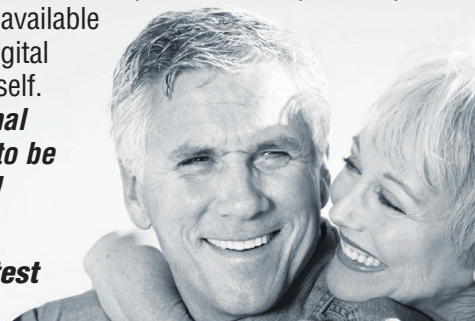
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