

HALTON POLICE WARN OF PHONE SCAMS OPERATING LOCALLY

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Halton regional police are cautioning local residents to be vigilant against several telephone scams that are currently impacting the community.

Over the past few weeks, police say Halton residents have reported receiving bogus calls that largely fall under four themes:

Scam one: The caller indicates they're from the Canadian Revenue Agency and that you owe money for taxes. In some cases, the suspect tells the victim a warrant will be obtained and they'll be arrested if they don't make an immediate payment, which is requested in the form of gift cards that aren't traceable (i.e. Amazon, iTunes, Google Play). The victim purchases a large quantity of gift cards and gives the caller the personal identification number or verification number.

Scam two: The caller indicates they're from your bank and need help to investigate an internal fraud between the bank and another retail store. They say you've been selected to assist with the investigation and could earn up to \$500 for your help. The caller then directs you to purchase a large quantity of gift cards and call them back with the PIN. The victim is told where to purchase the gift cards and cautioned not to disclose the reason or directed to say the cards are being purchased as gifts for children or grandchildren. The suspect may also gain remote access to the victim's computer (online banking). The promised deposit appears in their daily banking account; however, it's

transferred from the victim's line of credit/savings unbeknownst to them.

Scam three: The caller identifies themselves as a bank employee and advises that one of your credit cards has been compromised. The caller indicates they'll deposit a large sum of money into your account (much larger than what you're alleged to have lost), however, you're asked to transfer a portion back. The suspect may gain remote access to the victim's computer (online banking). The promised deposit appears in their daily banking account; however, it's transferred from the victim's line of credit/savings unbeknownst to them.

Scam four: The caller indicates they're with some type of police or other law enforcement agency, or a lawyer representing a loved one (they will often use a grandchild and elicit a promise not to tell anyone). The caller then directs the victim to initiate a money transfer, often asking for thousands of dollars to "post bail" for a loved one. Older adults are often the target of this scam because they want to help their grandchild.

Just hang up the phone: Police

While exact numbers of those impacted locally by phone scams weren't immediately available, Det. Const. Derek Gray, an older adult abuse and financial crime investigator with Halton regional police, said unfortunately many residents do fall victim.

"Stuff like this happens all the time," he said. "We refer to them commonly as mass marketing frauds."

One recent example he



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Halton police.

cited was an early morning call received by an older gentleman in Burlington, who was told his son had been involved in a drinking and driving accident that killed a young girl. After wiring \$6,000 to one bank and \$4,000 to another to help his son, he then found out the accident never happened, said Gray.

He encourages local residents to be diligent and always do their own investigating of any suspicious calls - a sentiment he's bolstering through the Twitter hashtag #beyourownsherlockholmes.

This can be done by

hanging up during the questionable phone call and calling the person or company back at a phone number that you independently look up, he said. Gray estimates this simple move would eliminate 80 per cent of the fraud taking place.

"Just hang up or screen your calls. You don't need to answer the phone," he said. "And never disclose any personal information to anyone ever over the phone."

Gray also encourages people to seek assistance from friends, the police and the Canadian Anti-

Fraud Centre (CAFC) if they're concerned about a call they've received.

According to the CAFC, less than five per cent of mass marketing fraud is ever reported.

For the elderly victims that Gray assists, he said they may be afraid or embarrassed to come forward for fear it will give their families the impression they can no longer handle their money independently.

But statistics from the CAFC reveal that local seniors wouldn't be alone. In 2017, the agency received 71,793 mass marketing

fraud complaints with a total reported dollar loss of \$110 million.

Halton regional police urge residents to be aware that no government agency, financial institution or legitimate business will ever give a customer money and ask for a portion to be reimbursed, or ask them to make a payment in gift cards or money transfers/wires, or assist with an internal fraud investigation.

Police say law enforcement agencies, bailiffs or lawyers will also never contact people to request that bail money be wire transferred.

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