

FRAUD AND SCAMS ON THE RISE IN HALTON

POLICE SHARE WAYS TO AVOID BECOMING A VICTIM

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The following is part three of a four-part Halton series on crime in the region. Next week, see part four focusing on residential break-ins.

A Halton woman is sharing her family's brush with a grandparent scam in order to help others avoid falling victim to similar schemes.

Sydney, who for safety concerns didn't want to share her last name, said she recently received a flurry of calls from her great aunt one morning. Because she was doing errands, she couldn't respond until she got home about two hours later.

"I called her back, and the first thing she said to me was, 'What's going on? Is he OK?'" she recalled her elderly aunt frantically asking about her brother after having received a call from someone posing as him and asking for money.

The imposter apparently told the aunt that he had been held for bail following

a text-and-drive incident, but couldn't get hold of other family members.

After a quick check, Sydney assured the aunt that her brother, who lives next door, was doing fine. Feeling relieved that the family dodged the attempted scam, she was still a little concerned that the perpetrator seemed to know her brother's and mother's names.

"What freaked us out was how much information he had about us," she said, later putting it down to an online obituary as the possible source of information.

More Canadians are falling victim to scams targeting seniors and vulnerable citizens, with reported losses of \$380 million in 2021 — a historic high, according to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre.

Halton police, in partnership with Crime Stoppers of Halton, held a prevention seminar recently to raise awareness about scams and frauds in Halton Hills and across the region.

At the online seminar, Det. Const. Lorena Mallinson listed grandparent scam — or emergency scam — among the most common ones. The fraud spectrum also includes scams related to lotteries and contests, dating and romance and the

Canada Revenue Agency (CRA).

When receiving a call from someone claiming to be a family member — typically pretending to be in an accident and needing bail money — or claiming to be a law enforcement official or lawyer, Mallinson said it's important to stay calm.

"A lot of people get worried about their child or the grandchild thinking that they're in trouble or hurt somebody else, and they'll do a lot of things that the grandchild or the lawyer says to do. Just remember that these calls aren't likely to be real. It's a scam," the detective said.

She said a legal entity won't ever ask people to send cash or use a money transfer service. In the case of a bail hearing, she said it's either done at the courthouse or more recently online.

"We would never ask you to keep it secret and we would be more than happy to have you contact us to try to gather further information," she said.

The detective also suggested hanging up and calling the family member directly to verify information, and not to give any personal information away.

The seminar also dis-



Bambang Sadewo/Metroland

Det. Const. Lorena Mallinson warns Halton residents about the increase in phone scams.

cussed more complex frauds involving businesses, including investment frauds.

Det. Const. Kevin Barkhouse said that fraud involving cryptocurrency is getting very popular. In Halton alone, there have been 57 reports of cryptocurrency fraud, totalling \$8.3 million in losses.

The fraud typically involves people receiving unsolicited calls about making investments in a cryptocurrency, promising unrealistically high returns with no risk.

"Check the legitimacy of the investment with your provincial or territorial reg-

ulators. So in Ontario, that's the Ontario Securities Commission," said Barkhouse.

When it comes to businesses offering air duct cleaning services or other door-to-door sales that often use high-pressure tactics to get people to sign contracts, Barkhouse reminds residents they have the right to not let anyone into the house.

"Ask them to leave and then you can definitely call us and we can have them up and leave," he said. "Call the company yourself to make an appointment if you weren't expecting them."

Closing the seminar, Barkhouse said it's impor-

FRAUD PREVENTION TIPS

- Don't trust caller ID. A scammer can easily do what's called spoofing to make it look like a call is coming from someone else.
 - Don't be afraid to say no.
 - Don't be rushed into doing anything. Do research and do a Google search on names, phone numbers, and businesses if not sure.
 - Never give out personal information.
 - Don't use the same password for different accounts and try to create longer, complex passwords. There are many apps, such as 1Password, that can generate passwords and store them safely.
- For advice, contact Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (1-888-495-8501) or Halton Regional Police — Fraud Intake (905-465-8741).

tant for victims of fraud to speak out.

"Please don't be afraid or embarrassed to report it," he said. "Even if you didn't lose money, it's good to share this information with people. And a lot of times when these things are happening, some of these scammers will pressure you not to tell anybody. So you know, it's good to share that with your family or friends."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: As part of Fraud Prevention Month, we wanted to let residents know about some of the more common scams and frauds and share some prevention tips.

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