

Telemarketing scams a police concern

By Oksana Buhel

Those people who do not pay attention while being solicited on the telephone may later file one of the thousands of complaints received annually by the police, Science Canada and provincial consumer protection ministries.

Halton Regional Police Services (HRPS) Sergeant Joe Martin said many people do not pay a sufficient amount of attention to callers who try to sell goods or services over the telephone. "It (telemarketing scams) is something people think about from time to time, but not something people really pay attention to until they hear about an especially substantial fraud," Martin pointed out.

A Georgetown telemarketing company was investigated in July when an employee became suspicious of the goods offered by the company. The company was selling time shares at Ontario resorts, but allegedly denied this when attempting to make the sale.

HRPS Detective Constable Bob Percy, who was investigating the case, pointed out since no member of the public complained, the case did not fall under the Criminal Code. It was referred to the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, where it is still being investigated for claim misrepresentation.

Telemarketing is becoming an increasingly lucrative business. Statistics provided by HRPS indicate one of every 10 telemarketing calls, legitimate or illegitimate, results in a sale. The difference between the

two is illegitimate telemarketing occurs between 25 - 100 times more frequently.

Those who have fallen prey to telemarketing frauds may be more susceptible to future scams because their names are "reloaded", or exchanged, between telemarketers.

Assuming the company identifies itself and gives its telephone number, individuals should be wary of companies based in Montreal, since close to 90 per cent of illegal telemarketing companies operate out of the city. If the company identifies itself, individuals are advised to thoroughly investigate the enterprise and verify data. They are also advised to request names of satisfied customers in the area.

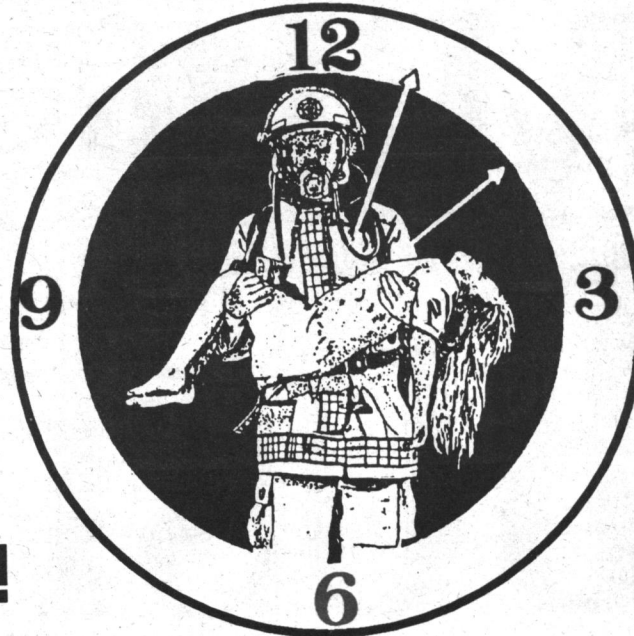
Illicit telemarketers often promise "free" prizes for those who purchase a good or service, but the prizes are usually poor quality or only redeemable under very inflexible conditions. "Nothing is for free - do not be tricked by offers of free vacations or promotions designed to lure you into purchasing goods," said HRPS Deputy Chief A. John Barratt.

A final precautionary measure is to avoid giving any credit card information over the phone. Through the "reloading" process, one telemarketer may obtain an individual's credit card number, and another - the expiry date. The combination may be used as an authorization of the use of the card.

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