

Rise in counterfeit money seen locally, a lot at Slots

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

Counterfeit money is on the rise, and nowhere is this more obvious than at Slots at Mohawk Racetrack, where state-of-the-art detectors seldom let fakes slip through the cracks.

"Halton Police are requested, on a frequent basis, to investigate persons with counterfeit currency, which is the quickest growing offence type," reads a report submitted last month by Halton Regional Police superintendent Mike Kingston to town council.

The report noted police responded to calls regarding suspected counterfeit money in the Mohawk area about 208 times in the first six months of this year. The vast majority of calls were to Slots at Mohawk rather than the racetrack.

The value of the counterfeit bills seized from January to June this year was \$4,240, Staff Sgt. Larry Masson said.

During the first six months last year, Halton police responded to about 164 counterfeit calls at the casino, making for a nearly 27 per cent increase in the number of counterfeit calls police responded to at Mohawk this year over last.

"Our service calls in the area have multiplied significantly since the casino opened," Staff Sgt. Masson said.

Although it's possible a few of those calls this year and last could have been to places in the vicinity of Mohawk and not the facility itself, and a couple could have been calls for other reasons, the vast majority would have been to the slots facility when counterfeiting was suspected, Staff Sgt. Masson said.

"Ninety-nine, if not 100 per cent of the counterfeit money occurrences would have been at the casino," he said of the Guelph Line facility in Campbellville, which opened in 1999.

Each time a counterfeit bill is reported to police, an officer must attend in person, seize the money and do the required paperwork, taking up valuable time, Staff Sgt. Masson said.

Superintendent Kingston said the reason there seems to be more counterfeit money at Mohawk than anywhere else around town is the sheer volume of cash being circulated and Mohawk's high-tech detection system.

"Mohawk has a very sophisticated money verification system," he said, likening the issue of counterfeiting to an iceberg — the visible part of the peak represents counterfeit money found at Mohawk, while the part of the iceberg under water is all the phony currency not detected at other places.

Every time an officer is called to Mohawk to investigate a potential fake bill, it takes about an hour of the officer's time, he said.

Most times when people are apprehended at Mohawk in connection with counterfeit money, they're found to be innocent, not realizing the money was fake, Superintendent Kingston said.

"We don't see a lot of rewards in the form of arrests," he said, adding, "It takes a lot of investigating to get to the point where we know who made it (the money)."

He said the problem will most likely get worse.

"With the strength of computers and printers, it will probably climb," he said, adding, "Counterfeiting is an epidemic across Canada."

The numbers at Mohawk, he said, while high, are fairly typical of what's going on in other slot facilities across Canada.

Theresa Roncon, spokesperson for Slots at Mohawk Racetrack, said in a facility with such a large amount of money changing hands, it's a reality that some of the bills will be phony. "In terms of if it's an issue, any counterfeit money is an issue, but we have highly-trained staff and detection devices."

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