

BUSINESSES END UP PAYING FOR LONG-DISTANCE PHONE CHARGES

Business groups warn of phone and e-mail scams

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Scam artists are making phone calls all over the world and getting unsuspecting businesses to pay for them.

Local business groups have joined the Peel Regional Police and the Ontario Provincial Police in warning the public, including the business community, about frauds linked to the telephone and the computer.

Ruth Burkholder, chief administrative officer for the Markham Board of Trade, said many of the telephone calls are being made from prisons. While the callers claim to be phone technicians checking the telephone lines, they're really thieves.

People answering the phones are asked to punch a few numbers and then hang up.

Once they hang up, the callers have free worldwide access to long distance telephone service.

Burkholder advises "not to press numbers for anyone."

"If you comply with the caller's wishes, you'll give that person and others complete access to your phone to make calls, which are charged to your number to anywhere in the world," said Burkholder.

In addition, investigators from the Peel Regional Police have issued an e-mail alert, advising the public to use caution when getting involved with people over the Internet.

Potential victims are contacted either by e-mail or fax.

The originators may claim to be a representative of a Nigerian government agency. In one case, a victim was taken for more than \$30,000, police report.

In this particular scam, the recipient is urged to provide the sender with personal information such as name, address and bank account information relating to their business.

The sender will claim he wishes to transfer millions into the recipient's account and that a commission will be paid for use of the account.

"Now comes the hook," said Det. Sgt. Manuel Rodrigues.

"The recipient has to send thousands of dollars to Nigeria to facilitate the transfer of the funds. Of course, once the cash has been sent, the victim never hears from the originator again," said Rodrigues.

The federal government, through Industry Canada, has joined the fight against e-mail scams, while the workload for the OPP's Phone Busters continues to increase, said OPP fraud specialist Kyle Lariviere.

One of the best defences against such scams is public education, stressed Lariviere.

"Education is one of the key components in fighting this type of thing. Informing the public is so important," he said.

The public, especially seniors, must be made aware that "these types of scams are with us again," said Helen Johnson, president of the Stouffville Chamber of Commerce.

"For goodness sake, let's make sure all of our community is aware. No community is immune. Stouffville has been stung in the past. It could happen again," Johnson said.

Investigation continues in senior's crash

The investigation continues after an 80-year-old woman drove her car through the plate glass window of a Markham Scotiabank branch Wednesday afternoon.

Staff-Sgt. Al Ledger said experts are going over the woman's Mercedes 280 SE to rule out mechanical failure in the crash which sent seven people to hospital, including a 10-year-old girl.

"I believe all the people sent to Markham Stouffville Hospital have been released," he said, adding two people transported to Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre suffered non-life-threatening injuries.

"We are still investigating at this stage," he said.

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